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THE WATER GIPSIES

Volume I

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A. P. Herbert

THE WATER GIPSIES

Volume I

ULVERSCROFT
Leicester

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TO MY WIFE, WITH LOVE

G.L.

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THE WATER GIPSIES

I

JANE

JANE BELL did not have a very happy birthday, and it was like nothing that she had seen on the pictures. Her birthday began about one o'clock in the morning, when Mrs. Raven's Margaret woke up and complained of pains; Margaret's complaints woke up Tom, who fidgeted till three o'clock. Jane slept from three till six, when the alarm-clock under the bed woke all three of them. She jumped up quickly, afraid of over-sleeping, sponged her face with cold water, and dressed. She peeped through the blind, but did not pull it up, for there was a hope that the children might sleep a little more. It was a fine summer's morning, with a low mist on the river, and the tide was rising, rippling over the mud. She wished she had slept at home on the barge, where some one would have wished her many happy returns, but Nurse was away on a holiday and Jane was helping with the children. She went downstairs quietly, glad to escape from them, for, though they were little dears, they were a worry, and not in her line; but she was always glad to oblige Mrs. Raven, who was so fussed with her family and household cares. She lit the gas-ring, put on the kettle, and prepared one tray for the Ravens' tea and another for Mr. Bryan's.

Florry was not up yet, and Jane reflected, as she often did, that really she did the whole work of this house. But while she waited for the milk she thought about Fred, for it was Friday and in the evening she would be going out with Fred, if neither of the children had fits (there was generally some disaster on her evening out). But she would go out to-night, fits or no fits, for, after all, she was twenty to-day, and something ought to happen on such

a day; and she did not see Fred so often. Not that much was likely to happen with Fred, if a girl saw him every night for a twelvemonth. Still, an evening out ahead brightened up the morning, and for a moment she thought of taking up a cup of tea to Florry, in her bed. But she thought better of it, for Florry had too much of her own way, and was always getting round people with her persuasive tongue and her fits of temper. So Jane was not going to encourage her, and she sat and drank a cup of tea herself, thinking about Fred, and about Ernest, her other young man, and wondering why neither of them was quite satisfactory. Then she made a cup of tea for Florry after all, and took it up to her. Florry said that she was just that moment getting up, and that Jane was a good girl; then she drank her tea and turned over and went to sleep again.

Jane took up the Ravens' tea and drew the curtains. Mr. and Mrs. Raven lay in their bed like two dead bodies, as usual, and Jane felt superior, as usual, as people do who have left their beds earlier than others; and she wondered, as usual, what it was like to sleep all night in the same bed with a man; and she concluded, as usual, that there was not much to be said for it, for Mr. Raven had pushed his wife over to one edge of the bed and pulled the bedclothes over to his own side. Mrs. Raven opened her eyes and closed them again; but Mr. Raven showed no sign of life at all. Jane went on to Mr. Bryan, the artist, who had the top floor. There were no curtains to draw here, and Mr. Bryan lay wide-awake in the sunny room, staring at the open windows. She liked this visit better, for here was somebody who knew that she existed and said 'Good morning' and smiled at her. This morning he said, 'How are you?' as well, and to her surprise she said, 'Quite well, thank you, Mr. Bryan. It's my birthday.' He said, 'Eighteen?' and she said, 'No, twenty, Mr. Bryan.' He said, 'Well, God bless you. I must draw you one day,' and she said, 'Thank you, Mr. Bryan,' and went out, blushing.

Once or twice before Mr. Bryan had said he would draw her, and she did not know whether to be pleased or not, for she had often studied his pictures of ladies while

she did his room, and as a rule his ladies wore no clothes and had triangular legs; and wherever a lady was round, so far as she knew, Mr. Bryan put straight lines and sharp corners. Florry said she did not think these pictures were drawn by Mr. Bryan at all, but were the work of his godchild, or a niece, perhaps, only she seemed to get no better at her drawing. But Jane liked Mr. Bryan's blue eyes and cheerful smile and healthy brown face; and he gave very little trouble in the house, though he might not know much about the shape of a lady's legs. So she went downstairs more cheerful, dressed the children, and tried not to be sharp with Tom, who made a fuss about wearing his new combinations. Then there was the long business of the children's breakfast, with which Florry was late, as usual, and the business of after-breakfast, which was even more trying. When that was done there was the grown-ups' breakfast, and trouble was always likely to come of that. This morning Mr. Raven saw something in *The Times* about the state of the country which upset him, so he complained about the toast and the tea, and about the cleaning of his boots; for Mr. Raven was a Civil Servant, and the state of the country very often upset him, especially in the morning. At dinner-time he was stronger and enjoyed all the calamities in the evening papers. Mr. Bryan did not bother about the state of the country, but looked at the pictures in the *Daily Mirror* and ate what was given him.

Then Florry and Jane had their own breakfasts, and in the middle of it Mrs. Raven came in and made plans for everybody for the day. And in the middle of that Mr. Raven went off in a hurry and came back in a hurry and shouted down the basement stairs to enquire who had hidden his umbrella. So Jane ran up and showed him where she had put it in the coat-cupboard, because Tom would play with it. Mr. Raven said it was an extraordinary thing that he couldn't leave an umbrella in his own hall, and went off angrily to govern the country.

Jane did the bedrooms and emptied the slops, and began to do the stairs; and then the bell began to ring as the tradesmen called. Florry very often turned deaf

or discovered some engrossing task about bell-ringing time, for she disliked answering the door, except to her friend the man from Harrods, who called much later. This morning she had found it necessary to beat a rug in the garden, so Jane ran up and down from her stair-rods to the door, and took in the milk and the potatoes, and the fish and the bread. All the young men said it was a nice morning, and gave her a special smile, for she was a favourite, and the milkman would have stayed talking; but Jane was no more than polite, for she was thinking of Fred to-day, and, besides, she had too much to do. Nothing seemed to go right this morning. Something was wrong with the geyser, the sink in the scullery was stopped up, Mrs. Raven telephoned and fussed up and down, poor thing, and in the middle the man came to measure the dining-room chairs, and Tom, who was always falling down, fell on to a broken flower-pot and cut his knee. Jane was sorry for Mrs. Raven, and always did her best to help, because Mrs. Raven met her troubles bravely, though she did fuss. But it was a good thing when she went out to shop and people could get on with their work in peace. As Jane proceeded downwards from one stair-rod to another she wondered more and more why any one married and had children and the troubles of a home; for, really, though Mrs. Raven was well-off, her life seemed one long worry. All the morning, however, she thought of Fred and her evening out; and yet, if anything ever came of her evenings out with Fred (or Ernest), she supposed it would be marriage with Fred (or Ernest) and children and troubles; so life seemed a puzzle.

Life seemed so different from the pictures. There were no stair-rods on the pictures, or stopped-up sinks, and if there was anything of that sort, it was made funny, which it very seldom was at the Ravens'. Jane's father played the 'cello at a cinema, and sometimes the cornet, so that what she and her sister did not know about the pictures was not worth knowing. And she believed that the exciting life of the pictures was real life and this business of stair-rods and washing-up was a mistake. Either it was a mistake (which she sometimes feared would last for a lifetime), or else it was only the first reel of a dramma.

from which, if one managed properly, one would emerge to happiness and wealth and a long kiss in public.

Jane saw Life in capital letters. She saw it in terse dramatic phrases like the titles of the pictures and the bits of writing which from time to time explained them. When Florry was unkind to her, she thought of herself as an 'Orphan of the Storm', or 'One of the World's Waifs'. But her favourite was the 'Pawn Who Became a Queen', which was the theme of 'Mated'; and often she saw herself hopping, skipping, and steadily advancing over the squares of Life to the ultimate square of Queenery and Joy. Anyhow, she knew quite well that she was born for better things than stair-rods.

She stood up to ease her back by the window which looked out over the river. There was a soft breeze from the south-west, and the breeze ruffling the tide made a million sparkles in the sun. Down by the barge which was her home she saw Lily sailing about in their crazy little boat. She saw that Lily had set the sail badly, and she wished she was on the water with Lily; for she belonged to the water and loved the water even more than the pictures; and she had a feeling that if ever she lived like the pictures it would be on the water. Perhaps that was why she liked Fred, with all his faults; for Fred belonged to the water too, and worked a canal-boat, which was now unloading in the creek at Hammersmith.

Mr. Bryan, coming downstairs and seeing the light on Jane's brown hair and the serious considering expression on her face, which he liked, thought also that Jane had been born for better things. Her hair was bobbed now, like the young ladies', though not so clean. She had very large brown eyes, a small straight nose, and a small round face. He did not know if she could be called intelligent (he did not insist upon great intelligence in women, though he might pretend that he did among the intelligent). But it was a brave little face, attractive to the eye and to the sympathies. Mr. Bryan thought she must have a secret worry and secret impossible dreams. She had something in her and was worth drawing. She looked up as he came down, the stair-rod in her hand, and he said, 'Busy?' She looked out of the window and said, 'It's a very high

tide, Mr. Bryan,' for every one speaks about the tide at Hammersmith, where this great wonder happens twice a day.

'It's a shame to be indoors,' he said, not meaning it much, but she said, 'Yes, Mr. Bryan,' with such a wistful tone that he knew she did mean it, and it touched him. He took one of her hands, stooped down, for she was small, and kissed her lightly, saying, 'That's for your birthday.' She did not giggle, or simper, or cry out, 'Oh, Mr. Bryan!' but she said, 'Thank you,' and looked after him solemnly as he went on down the stairs. Afterwards she told Lily that this was the first real thrill of her life, though of course there was nothing in it. It was the first time anything happened which was at all like the pictures; and though by all the rules she knew that she had been 'insulted', she felt proud. She passed on to the next stair-rod, and sang to herself a song called 'Always'.

When the stairs were done she took the children to the Recreation Ground—Tom in the pram and Margaret walking. There was trouble because Margaret wanted to take her elephant, and Mrs. Raven had said not. Tom was let loose in the Recreation Ground, and Jane sat on one of the public seats and talked to a very fat nurse with a very young baby in a very large pram. Jane mentioned that it was her evening out and she was going out with her friend, and the nurse said:

'Thinking of marriage?'

'He's never spoken yet,' said Jane.

'Some of them never will,' said the nurse, 'without they're galvanized'; and she brooded darkly over some old memory. 'It's different to-day,' she went on at last. 'If I'd had the opportunities of the young girls of to-day I should have been married forty years ago. We had to wait till a gentleman spoke. Nowadays, if he don't speak, the young woman speaks for him, from all that I hear.'

'Do you wish you was married?' asked Jane curiously.

'I've been forty years,' said the nurse, 'looking after other people's babies.'

'That's more than I'll do,' said Jane.

'Well, don't be too ladylike, that's all,' said the nurse.

'That was my trouble. Specially with the shy ones. My friend was too shy to express his feelings, and I was too refined to show mine. All he wanted was a little encouragement—that I do know. But could I give it to him? No. So we drifted apart.'

There was silence for some time after this, while Jane wondered whether Fred needed galvanizing; and then Tom fell down and cut his knee again. The old nurse rose and slowly went away, murmuring endearments to the other people's baby under the hood of the pram.

On her way home Jane passed by a row of little houses where three wives stood at their doors and discussed the drawbacks of that married state for which the fat nurse had hankered in vain. Mrs. Rogers said, 'I said to him, I said, "If you strike me again, it's the end," I said'; and Mrs. Parrish said, 'Just what I said to Parrish many a time.' Jane decided again that life was a puzzle and she had been born for better things.

All day she seemed to be at it. After lunch Mrs. Raven took the children out and she did out the dining-room. After that she did get a moment to herself, slipped upstairs and had a bath and washed her head, for Fred's benefit. It was the one great blessing of her life with the Ravens, the bath, for there was no bath on the barge except a round, yellow, flat thing in which she and Lily would stand and scrub each other on Friday evenings if it were not too cold. While she lay in her bath she heard Mr. Bryan singing in the next room. She wondered suddenly if he would like to draw her in her bath, and blushed; and she noticed for the first time that when she blushed, she blushed down her arms, which seemed a strange thing to do. She dried her hair over the gas-stove in the kitchen, till Florry came down and told her how a young girl at Woolwich had done that, and, falling asleep, had burst into flames; for Florry was a romancer, and had a story about everything.

She put on her cap and apron, in which she looked still less like a housemaid, and more like a very young actress playing a housemaid, with her shining eyes and hair fluffed out after the bath. She took up Mrs. Raven's tea, and gave the children their tea, and washed up the

tea-things. Then the washing came back in a huge basket, left by a hunch-back who admired her; and while Mrs. Raven had the children in the drawing-room she sorted out the linen, counted the handkerchiefs and the pillow-slips and the stiff-starched shirts, carried armfuls of the heavy sheets upstairs to the linen-cupboard, and put everything away. Then it was time to bath the children. They sat at opposite ends of the bath and sailed boats and splashed her. She laughed and seemed as much amused as they were, but all the time she was thinking, 'What a long day; but I shall see Fred to-night.'

No sooner were the children safely tucked in bed and eating their bread and milk than it was time to lay for dinner. Naturally, because it was her evening out, Mr. Raven came home later than usual. This was because some one had asked a question in Parliament about the Supply of Young Women for Domestic Service. Mr. Raven knew more about that than any one else at the Ministry, though he did not know much about Jane, not even her surname or the colour of her eyes. Still, he knew the statistics, and could tell you the number of women on the register for the last five years without looking at the *Board of Trade Gazette*. The result of this question in Parliament was that the Ravens were still dining at a quarter-past eight, and she was to meet Fred at half-past. So when she had taken in the savoury and carried down the meat-course back to the kitchen, she said, 'Well, I'm out of this—Fred's waiting, and it makes him wild,' though this was not quite true, for Fred was never wild, and, being a waterman, was used to waiting. But Jane was tired of this day, and it was her birthday, and really Florry did less and less for her money. She felt rebellious, and was not going to make her hands hot and red with washing-up just before she met Fred. By rights her day out should have begun long ago, after lunch, but she had a bad habit of lingering on while there was any work to do. Florry knew of this habit, and thought it good, so she looked at Jane in sorrow. It was the custom between them that Florry did the drying while Jane stood over the greasy basin in the sink, fished out the knives, and scoured the butter off the plates. It was

a very rare thing in these days for Florry to do both the washing and the drying, so she opened her mouth to say sharply that some people were in a great hurry to run away from a little work. But then she remembered that Jane had brought her a cup of tea in bed that morning, and she hoped this would happen again; also she was romantic, and it pleased her to think of Jane in the arms of Fred. So she said kindly, 'Cut along then; only don't get into trouble—that's all.'

'No danger of that,' said Jane. 'My friend and the Salvation Army are brothers.'

Still, Florry's warning gave her a little excitement as she took off quickly her cap and apron and put on her dark red coat, her 'nude' silk stockings, and her little red hat, which she fancied was perhaps on the wicked side. Certainly she had no wish to get into trouble, for she was a good girl, or thought she was, though nothing had ever happened to put the matter to the test. But to-night, after this long day of trouble and fuss, she did feel the need of something with a flavour to it—something worthy of a girl who was twenty to-day and born to be a queen. And she did hope that Fred would be a little less like a brother to the Salvation Army to-night.

II

FRED

ON the pictures, or in books, when a young man is expecting a young lady who is late, he behaves in an excited manner which is complimentary to the young lady. He peers in this direction and in that through the shadows, biting his lips. His face becomes very pale and drawn and his hair disordered, and he stands under a street-lamp with his mouth twitching. Other couples pass by him who have succeeded in meeting at the appointed time, and when he sees these he suffers torments of envy. His eyes roll and he staggers like a drunken man. In quick succession he registers many emotions, and there is not the smallest doubt about the state of his mind.

But Fred was not like this. Jane arrived twenty minutes late, having stopped at the barge to kiss her sister and peep at her birthday presents. The meeting-place was the fifth elm from the public-house, the 'Black Swan'. She had begged Fred to be there in good time, so as to secure the fifth elm before any other couple, for these elms were favourites with lovers, and especially the fifth, which was the last in the row and farthest from the street-lamp. So Fred, who was faithful if he was nothing else, had probably been waiting there for forty minutes. But he was not peering along the street or pacing up and down like a tiger, or tearing his hair, or rolling his eyes. Fred was leaning against the elm, with his foot on the low river wall, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and his cap on the back of his head, which rested against the tree-trunk; and he was staring at the river as if nothing important was in his mind. He should have been distracted, but he looked contented.

Jane tripped up to him, her little feet pattering, her breath coming and going, and she said, ''Evening, Fred.'

Fred turned and took the cigarette out of his mouth and said, 'Evening, Jenny."

Fred was the only person who called her Jenny, and she liked it.

She put up her face, and Fred kissed her, putting his hands, like two bags of lead, on her shoulders. Jane remembered that another man had kissed her that day, and she remembered that kiss, so light and quick, and yet electric, making her tingle. Fred's kiss was like a lump of dough, clumsy and heavy and, truth to tell, damp. She did not tingle at all; she felt disappointed and a little guilty, but more disappointed than guilty. Fred put his arms awkwardly round her, his great hands grasping her shoulder-blades. He was very strong, he smelt of tar and wood-smoke, and Jane thought that if he would use all his strength on her and hug her heartily, as she had seen the 'Man of Passion' do at the Blue Halls, she might perhaps be thrilled after all. But Fred did not do this—not because he did not worship her, but because he was shy and thought she would object.

So they stood by the fifth elm, she like a nymph in the embrace of a timid bear. The street-lamp made five deep pools of shadow between the elms and the river wall, and in each of these pools there was a couple, standing like stone figures against their tree or sitting on the wall. But the top of the wall was a sharp edge, not flat, and many lovers had complained about it.

'I'm late, Fred,' said Jane. 'Was you wild?'

'No, Jenny,' said Fred in his soft deep growl of a voice. 'I knew you'd come.'

Jane supposed that this was a compliment, but she could not help wishing that Fred had been just a little wild. 'Do you still like me, Fred?' she said.

'Yes, Jenny.'

She pulled him a little aside, so that he was in the lamp-light, and searched his tanned, good-looking face for some evidence of that passion. He met her gaze gravely; but he did not knit his brows or bite his lips, as she knew that true lovers did, nor could she see Smouldering Fires in his honest grey eyes.

'Well, you don't register much, do you?' she said.

'Register?'

'Well, no one could call you a Valentino, not for emotion, could they?'

Fred felt that something was expected of him, so he came back into the shadow and kissed her again, clumsily, on the nose, because Jane moved at the critical moment. If a kiss was not light and electric, like Mr. Bryan's, it should be endless and clinging, as it was on the pictures. She did not enjoy these uncomfortable dollops of affection.

But she looked at the river and knew that she wanted something. The river and the night were beautiful, and beauty made her want something, though she could not tell what, and she could not talk about it. The tide was rising again, and one of the first tugs came through Hammersmith Bridge, moving very slowly, for she was before her time. For a moment or two she was end-on to the lovers, both port and starboard lights staring at them together. Then as she turned the bend the red eye grew smaller, and vanished, and the green eye swelled and came on alone. Her silent tail of barges swung round after her into the lake of light above the bridge, where the flowing tide ran like a stream of silver. A man called a greeting from the tug to a watchman at the boat-houses, a brilliant motor-bus swam swaying over the bridge, and above the bus, though Jane did not know it, hung Orion and his belt. But she followed, fascinated, the green eye of the tug, for she knew all about tugs. 'The *Margaret*,' she said, and 'That's right,' said Fred. The tug went lazily past them, with a lazy chunk-chunk of the engine and a lazy swish at the bows, till at last the green eye narrowed too and was gone; and then there was nothing left but the little white stern-light of the last barge of all dwindling into the darkness beyond the island. Jane followed it with her eyes till it was gone, for although maybe the barge was bound no farther than Brentford, it was bound by water for the Great Unknown; and Jane felt that she was a Slave to the Wanderlust, which was a caption out of the 'Knight Errant'.

She remembered that Fred had once said that he would

like to take her for a trip up the canal with his father and mother, and she wondered if he had meant it. But Fred was so unsatisfactory—what did he mean ?

She sighed and said, ' It's ever so nice to-night.'

' Yes,' said Fred.

' It's my birthday, Fred.'

' Go on ? '

' Yes, it is,' said Jane a little impatiently, for it was one of Fred's trying ways to answer ' Go on ? ' incredulously to the most simple statement.

' Well, I wish I'd known,' said Fred heavily.

' What would you have done if you'd known ? '

' Well, I dunno,' said Fred.

' Then what's the good of wishing ? ' said Jane.

Fred made no answer to this, but sat down suddenly on the wall, still encircling her mildly with his terrific arms ; but now her knees were fixed painfully against his, and the rest of her was leaning uncomfortably over him, and they were still as remote as two people on the Underground Railway. But Jane knew that Love is chiefly Suffering, so she did not complain ; and this sudden sitting down of Fred was the nearest thing to an amorous gesture that Fred had ever done.

' You haven't wished me many happy returns,' she said.

' Well, I do, Jenny,' said Fred.

He laid his head upon her breast and was silent. She was stirred a little, and remembered something she had read about the Maternal Instinct, but this did not console her much ; her knees hurt, and she felt that they were in a very foolish position. She looked along to the other elms, and saw that the other couples were locked each in a close embrace, and lost to the world. No tug, no passer-by, no star distracted them.

From the nearest elm she heard shy laughter, and a girl's voice said, ' You mustn't, George ! ' She guessed that George was messing about, and it was something to be sure that, anyhow, Fred would never do that. But would he ever do anything ?

Fred, meanwhile, was longing to stand up suddenly and crush her against his blue jersey in a mighty embrace.

But he did not dare, he did not know. He had heard how girls of the best sort would slap a man's face when clasped in that manner. They would bite and scream and summon the police; and from these situations arose those ugly charges of assault and so on. It was not to be supposed that a girl so lovely and excellent as Jenny Bell would want to be hugged by him, whatever nonsense she had talked about registering; indeed, he could not understand how she had endured the daring approaches he had made already. And he respected her so much that to risk her contempt was not to be thought of. Besides, there was his father, and he could not ignore the wise, stern warning of his father against a boatman marrying a girl 'off the shore'. Fred was worried.

'If you don't mind,' said Jane, 'I'll sit down too, Fred. I've the cramp all over.'

He loosed his iron grip, and she sat down on the sharp edge of the wall. She remembered what the nurse had said about galvanizing, and she slipped her arm about him. He put his arm round her, and they sat with their heads together, staring at the elm, and said nothing at all for a quarter of an hour.

Then the two Misses Anstruther, who had been having a little music with the Wilsons, passed homewards along the pavement on the other side of the road. And Jane heard the older Miss Anstruther say it was disgusting, all these couples in the dark. The younger Miss Anstruther answered, 'Yes, isn't it?' and something about the police. Jane wondered if they would have found it disgusting to sit with Fred on the sharp edge of a wall, and suddenly she threw up her head and laughed aloud. The couples under the elms did not even turn their heads, but the Misses Anstruther quickened their tiny steps, and the policeman under the lamp-post looked suspiciously at the fifth elm.

'What's the matter?' said Fred.

'I was thinking.'

'Go on?'

'It's funny, isn't it,' said Jane. 'They say love is the greatest thing in life, and yet when a person's in love there's nowhere to go—not for you and me.'

'That's right,' said Fred, not knowing what she meant; for to Fred it seemed natural and proper that the poor should have to make love in holes and corners.

But Jane had a roving imagination, and she saw thousands of couples under the London stars, huddled behind trees, leaning against walls, sitting on hard benches, if they were lucky, on wet nights, on cold nights, in Lovers' Lanes and passages, on pieces of waste ground, frowned upon by the Misses Anstruther and sometimes moved on by the police.

Yet this love was the great and noble adventure of life, with which all the books and pictures and comic songs were concerned, the one thing common to the rich and the poor; and it did seem strange that when the poor were in love the most private place they could find was the corner of a public street. And this evening that she was spending with Fred was the most exciting thing in the week, and that was funny too. She wondered if among all the couples of London there was a single girl who had such a dear old sheep as Fred for a lover. And she wondered if even those luckier girls under the other elms had found out the real truth about Love's Bliss? Anyhow, there must be something more in it than had come her way, and she meant to find out what it was. But probably she would never have much help from Fred.

Fred shifted his position on the wall and said, 'What are you thinking, Jenny?'

'This wall's no cushion,' she said.

'You're right,' said Fred.

After this exchange the lovers sat silent again, while Fred nerved himself for an audacious stroke. At last his arm tightened about her and he said, 'Jenny?'

'Yes, Fred?'

'You know what I said about taking you a trip up the "Cut" one day?'

(The Cut is the irreverent name of the boatmen for the Grand Union Canal.)

'Yes, Fred,' said Jane.

'Well, I can't do it, Jenny—not yet.'

'Oh!'

'It's father, you see.'

'Yes, Fred,' said Jane. 'Let's stand up, shall we? I'm sore.'

They stood up, and Fred leaned against the tree, holding her hands.

'Father's particular, you see, about taking a girl off the shore.'

'I live on the water,' said Jane.

'But you were born on the shore, you see. That's what he says.'

'Well, don't worry, Fred. It don't signify.'

'Well, what I thought,' said Fred, for the first time stumbling in his speech as he unfolded his tremendous scheme, 'the next time we come down, you take the dinghy out and show him what you can do, you see, and then he'll see, you see.'

Jane saw, but she was not sure that she wished to be chosen in marriage for her methods of handling a boat. So she said, 'Well, I don't know that it matters all that amount, Fred.'

'But it does,' said Fred. 'Say you will, Jenny.' And he spoke with an urgency and fondness so out of the common with him that she could not bear to be unkind, and she said:

'All right, Fred. When'll you be back?'

'Three weeks. Perhaps four.' Fred stepped to the wall and looked down at the river. The mud, the reeds, had disappeared, and the water was lapping against the wall. There were two green eyes passing now, and all down the river the tugs were hooting to warn the wharves at which they were to call. The busy hour of the river was beginning. 'I've got to go now, Jenny,' said Fred. 'We'll push out and anchor as soon as we float.'

'All right,' said Jane. 'Kiss me, Fred.'

Fred kissed her more boldly than before, for now that his plan for the persuasion of his father was afoot the future seemed easier. Then they walked along to the creek where Fred's father's boats were lying against 'Mulberry Wharf'. There were two of them, the *Prudence* and the *Adventure*, long, narrow vessels built for the canal, and painted gaily in the ancient style of the canal with Castles and Hearts and Roses They were worked along the canal to Birmingham and back by Fred Green and his father and his mother and

his young brother Arthur, and a brown horse called Beauty, of which Jane had heard many fine stories. And now they were to be picked up by a tug and towed up the tideway to Brentford, where Beauty was waiting.

The boats were just afloat, and old Tom Green called impatiently to his son, as he stepped into the beam of light which came from the cabin of the *Prudence*. Tom Green stood forward on the *Adventure* with a long pole, and at the tiller of the *Prudence* stood an old woman with wild grey hair, a sharp face, a shiny black dress, and a leather belt. Her voice was permanently husky from some old affection of the throat, so that every syllable seemed dragged from her in pain, and her kindliest utterance had the malevolence of a hiss. When she said, 'Come along, son,' it sounded like an imprecation, and Jane drew back frightened into the shadows.

'This is my friend, mother,' said Fred. 'Dad, this is Jenny.'

''Evening, miss,' cried the old man kindly; 'but we've got to leave you.'

Mrs. Green said nothing, but her sharp eyes seemed to pierce the shadows as she peered at her son's young woman.

'Good night, Jenny,' said Fred, and shook her hand and dropped on to the *Prudence*. Fred on a boat was a different person, she saw—neat and quick, as he cast off the mooring ropes and ran along the narrow plank amidships and picked up his pole, and with long, strong thrusts drove the vessels under the little bridge and out into the tideway. 'Good night,' said Fred again, and 'Good night,' hissed Mrs. Green, as if it were a malediction. They were just in time, for as the tide caught them the tug *Richmond* hooted from the bridge, a thrilling, pleasant sound which Jane had loved all her life.

She walked back to the elm and watched the *Richmond* sweep up and round, putting her nose to the tide. The three fat coal-barges she had in tow swung round astern of her; there was the hollow clang of iron barges meeting, Fred's voice calling in the darkness, a tinkle from the engine-room bell, more calling and clanging, the creak of the tow-ropes as they took the strain, the red eye swung out of sight and gave place presently to the green, and the

Richmond steamed swiftly away towards Chiswick and the west.

Jane thought that she had seen a wonderful thing, though she had seen it often before; for this was Fred and the *Prudence* bound on a voyage of Mystery and Adventure, though the beginning was only Hammersmith and the end was only Birmingham. She was fired by the drama of that departure, and she wished she was in the *Prudence*, beginning the four-days' voyage to Birmingham, and travelling through the night with Fred. Or, better still, perhaps, with Mr. Bryan.

III

THE *BLACKBIRD*

WHILE Jane admired the disappearing *Prudence*, Fred sat in the tiny cabin of that vessel and described to his father the great qualities and beauty of Jane. Tom Green said what he had said before :

'It's no good taking a girl off the shore, my lad. It never was and never will be. You've got to be born to the life to stick it, my lad. Look at Bill Baker that took a girl out of a shop. Willing as you like—and she left him in six months.'

'Jane isn't a girl in a shop,' said Fred. 'She lives on a barge.'

'But was she born to it ?' said Tom. 'You was born on this boat, and I was born on this boat, and my mother before me was born on this boat. But was *she* born to it, lad ?'

'I dunno that she was,' said Fred ; 'but she belongs to the water. She can sail a boat.'

'She can't sail a boat on the Cut,' said his father. 'If she's not born to it, she won't stick it. You know that. D'you think she'll stick it yourself, Fred ? Honest ?'

'I think she would,' said Fred stubbornly.

A husky, sibilant voice spoke out of the darkness, where Mrs. Green stood at the tiller : 'She's neither one thing nor the other.'

Fred was silent, as he often was when his mother made a remark.

Jane was not born to a barge, but almost as long as she could remember she had lived on a barge with Lily and her father. Her mother had died when Lily was born, and after that her father had come down in the world and lost his money and come to London and bought the *Blackbird*, because he was born at Liverpool, and was fond of the water ; and because the *Blackbird* was cheaper than any

house that he could find; and also because, without his wife's guidance, he had always done the most extraordinary things.

The *Blackbird* was an old London River sailing-barge, though now she had neither mast nor rigging, but lay, a sheer hulk, against Valentine Wharf, a little below the 'Black Swan' inn. Mr. Bell had chosen this place for the *Blackbird* because of the 'Black Swan', which seemed to him an omen, for he was that kind of man. Now he earned a little money by playing the 'cello (or the cornet) in a cinema, and lost most of this money by betting on racehorses. But while his wife lived he had been the business manager of a repertory theatre in the north; his wife had sung at concerts, and managed the theatre.

Mr. Bell paid six shillings a week for his moorings to the owner of the wharf, Mrs. Higgins, who was also proprietress of the 'Black Swan'. But he had neither rent nor rates nor taxes to pay, and could devote almost everything to his racehorses. They lived on the barge in spacious squalor; she was eighty feet long and twelve feet wide, and dirty all over. Mr. Bell had no strong sense of class or caste, and was a natural picnicker. His life had become more and more of a picnic. Lily was like him, and when Jane was busy at the Ravens' they washed up every third day.

They lived in what had been the cargo space of the barge, decked over. There was one living-room, which was the size of many a rich man's drawing-room: but it had nothing in it but one table, two chairs and a stool, two cats and an anchor, a low bench against the port side, three old tarpaulins hanging on hooks, a coil of rope in one corner, Mr. Bell's 'cello in another (when he was playing the cornet), and in a third a crystal set which they were tired of. The floor was of bare boards, which Jane swept twice a day, and down the centre ran the great square beam which was the keelson and foundation of the barge. As he stepped over this the stranger bumped his head against the roof. On the table, which had a green baize cloth with holes in it, there were to be seen at any hour of the day a dirty plate or two, a teapot, and a pot of jam, half empty, and the wreck of a loaf of bread. The Bell daughters lived chiefly on bread

and tea and jam, on sardines and sausages, and potatoes and apples. And they looked very well on it.

Forward of the living-room was the principal state-room, where Mr. Bell slept; and beyond that a smaller cabin, which was Jane's; and beyond that a great waste space which was full of lumber, rotting ropes, old gum-boots, cans of dried paint, and a few rusty tools and another anchor. Properly used and reconstructed the *Blackbird* could have housed three families. But under Mr. Bell's government she seemed too small for three persons. Lily slept aft in a tiny cubbyhole, a mere hole in the wall in what had been the cabin when the barge was in commission and the hold was full of cargo. This hole was always an untidy tumble of bedclothes from the moment when Lily got up to the moment when she went to bed. There was very little light in the living-room. Mr. Bell had fitted one small skylight, and by degrees was adding tiny windows at the side; but this was a great feat of carpentry, and, what with his 'cello and his horses and losing his tools, a window took a long time, and a window a year was about all he could do. However, he was always on the point of beginning another window. By night they had an 'Aladdin' lamp, which had been a wonderful bargain at a sale in King Street. It combined all the advantages of paraffin and gas, and really, Mr. Bell would say, was as good as electric light, though it only illuminated a small round patch at the table end of the room The *Blackbird* was perhaps in many ways a deplorable residence; but still, outside was the open water and the wide sky. Looking westward up the river the eye could travel a mile or more, and the south-west wind which beat upon her flanks had come two miles without touching a house, which was more than many a rich Londoner could say of his residence. If down below the Bells lived in a slum, they were countrymen and sailors and children of the sun when they came on deck.

Various authorities had suspected that the Bells were not existing according to the best ideas of modern civilization, and had done their best to interfere with them. Once an Education man had nosed them out delightedly, but discovered only that the girls had been punctually attending a council school for many years; and Lily had stayed on

with a trade scholarship for two years beyond the usual age. An inspector of the Port of London Authority called once or twice in his motor-boat, because he felt sure that the home of such a family must be either insanitary or unhealthy or unseaworthy. But there popped up the ladder through the narrow hatch two girls with cheeks so glowing, eyes so bright, and arms so chubby that even a public official could not condemn them as unhealthy ; and if their hair was tousled and perhaps they did not wash so often as the inspector, he could not think of any regulation which was concerned with that. As for ' insanitary ', Mr. Bell proudly showed him that they had every convenience on the wharf ; and it was no business of the Port of London Authority what time Lily made her bed. As for ' unseaworthy ', the barge was solid as the hills, and might last as long. The river-police shook their heads at the girls because they would sail their crazy dinghy in all weathers, and took particular pains to go out in the hard south-westerly gales which make Hammersmith almost as dangerous as the Horn. But the girls always laughed at them and seemed quite at their ease ; and the more the spray soaked them, the more the boat heeled, and the more water she took on board, the more they laughed. The river-police had no authority to rescue suicides till they entered the water, so they did not know what to do. Besides, they did not really understand sailing, and did not know what was dangerous and what was not, though they were quite sure that something ought to be done about those girls. So they shook their heads again, and went on, remarking that, anyhow, they were well-plucked ones.

By land, the Metropolitan Police had no jurisdiction over the barge. But they used to peep through the rickety fence that bounded the narrow wharf, and feel in their bones that there must be something irregular which could be taken notice of. Some of them did not approve of the way the girls bathed in the summer, diving from the barge and standing drying in the sun, and laughing and enjoying themselves. For small boys used to peer through the holes and say ' Coo ! ', which the policemen thought was against public decency, so they moved the boys on. But they could not move the girls on, for any one may bathe from

a vessel or boat, and they wore neat, dark costumes well within the law, though it is true they were tight, and here and there had little holes in them.

So the Metropolitan Police, like the other authorities, shook their heads and passed on, feeling obscurely that no one should be able to live in this strange free manner in the County of London in the twentieth century, half-way 'twixt land and water, as it were. 'No better than gipsies,' as Constable Boot expressed it. And if there was nothing unlawful in that, well, there ought to be.

Authority might shake its head over the barbaric upbringing of these two girls, but they were healthy and alive; and as for the mind, apart from education, they were not without the refining influences of modern civilization, if authority had only known. They had the pictures constantly, for it was always a clause in Mr. Bell's contracts that his girls should be on the free list; and even when bread was short they could feed the mind on Hollywood. Mondays and Thursdays they saw the new programme, and were again encouraged by the success of virtue and the eventual discomfiture of wickedness. On these occasions, whatever the family misfortunes, they slipped up through the hatchway and across the muddy wharf, miraculously arrayed in silk stockings and fur collars, and the inspector of the Port of London Authority would not have known them.

Then they had the wireless, which they turned on often for the 'jazz' bands, and sometimes for good music, if Mr. Bell insisted. While the dog Toby lived they sometimes turned the wireless on for a talk on 'Carburettors' or 'The Care of Bees', for Toby had barking fits, and, as Lily had discovered, could very often be quieted by an educational Talk. But Toby was dead, they were tired of the wireless, and got more satisfaction from the *Sunday Gazette*.

Mr. Bell had the *Sunday Gazette* every week. It was the only paper he read, and he read it all Sunday. The girls read it all the rest of the week, while Mr. Bell was out. Not that Mr. Bell kept it from them, but if they read the police-court cases out loud he generally said something. And they preferred to read the cases out loud. They would start on page one and go steadily through the paper,

column by column, but missing out the sport and politics. Since this was the only paper they read, they formed a very poor opinion of human character, especially the character of men. From it they learned that the majority of men come sooner or later to murder or larceny, abduction and rape, bigamy, assault, embezzlement, or arson, and various other crimes which they did not understand. At the end of each case there was generally a little argument about the meaning of terms. Lily had an enquiring mind, and was not to be put off with phrases like 'proposals of a certain character'; she wanted to know exactly what was proposed; she wanted to know the precise distinction between 'intimacy' and 'misconduct'; she was always asking 'Why?' and 'How?' and as often as not Jane could not tell her. Sometimes, when she did know, she would remember that she was an elder sister and refuse to say; and then they would quarrel. Lily would complain that she always told Jane everything she knew, which was true enough; and she knew a lot, for Lily was the giddy one, and went out with wild boys.

As for the position of women in the world, that was made plain in this paper: they were defenceless creatures and had an adventurous time. They were carried into woods and throttled by bank-clerks. They were attacked in railway trains, they were enticed into motor-cars and whirled away to lonely parts of the shore. The governess on her innocent bicycle was set upon by masked men and gagged in a ditch; the young girl tripping home across the common was stopped by a well-spoken ruffian on a motor-bicycle, who asked her the way, dragged her into the gorse, kissed her, knocked her on the head with stones, and turned out to be a schoolmaster. It was a very strange world presented weekly by this paper to the enquiring girls. No one was safe in it, and men were capable of anything. And among all these perils the female victim seemed altogether helpless; by no act or negligence of her own did she ever affect the event; or, if she did, it never came out in these cases. Woman was an insect at the mercy of a monster; she was betrayed, deceived, seduced, wronged, ruined, assaulted, violated, or raped—and she had nothing whatever to do with it.

They had a happy evening with the *Sunday Gazette* on the Monday after Fred's departure.

'It seems to me,' said Lily at the end of the 'Murray Case', 'the more good you are the more trouble you get into. So why worry?'

'Don't talk like that,' said Jane. 'If a girl gets into trouble it's as much her fault as the man's.'

'Then why don't they say so in the papers?' asked Lily.

Jane did not know. Perhaps the message of the paper was much the same as the message of the pictures—that wickedness was wrong and unsuccessful. And this, no doubt, was the intention of its good proprietors, two of whom were noblemen. But this was not exactly the message which it brought to the two daughters of the *Blackbird*. Even on the pictures they preferred those moments when the innocent girl was in danger of losing her honour to the dark gentleman to the happy moments at the end when she was reunited to the fair one. And the weekly misfortunes of their sex in the *Sunday Gazette* did not excite in them horror and loathing, but curiosity and, truth to tell, a certain envy.

'I'd like something terrible to happen to me,' Lily murmured, closing her blue eyes dreamily like some Victorian miss yearning for the affections of a clergyman.

'Don't be silly, Lily,' said Jane sternly, for they had just been reading the sad tale of five young women who had been shamefully persuaded by some sailormen to embark as stowaways in a merchant-ship, and had been carried unwilling all the way to South America, supposing in their innocence that it was all a lark, and that after a day or two the captain would turn the ship round and bring them back to Bristol. She thought that Lily must have this dreadful narrative in her mind, and she was shocked. But she confessed to herself that she too had had secret imaginations of that kind, in which she had been violently carried off in a ship or motor-car, or even on horseback, as maidens were in history or on the pictures or in the *Sunday Gazette*, to be ruthlessly subdued by some strong though abominable male. These awful thoughts she had always put from her most firmly after a short time, and it was

disturbing to have to suspect them in the fair and fluffy head of her sister Lily.

The next remark that Lily made was even more shocking. 'Ruined,' she murmured, lying on the *Blackbird's* deck with her feet waving behind her and her eyes on page sixteen. 'I think it must be rather fun.'

'Lily!'

'Come off it, Jane,' said Lily. 'Well, I dunno. You know all that stuff in the stories about the young man saving her from worse than death. Worse than death!' said Lily contemptuously. 'Well, I don't believe it is.'

Jane said nothing, but she decided, like the river-police, that something ought to be done about Lily.

There were other civilizing influences in these girls' lives. When they had done the 'cases' in the *Gazette* they did the 'crossword puzzle'. They did it every week in the hope of a prize, and Mr. Bell had bought them a dictionary; and in the dictionary they looked up the words which baffled them in the 'puzzle', and some of the words which had baffled them in the paper.

Their other link with the great world was Mr. Bell's connection with horse-racing. Mr. Bell had never seen a horse-race. In his youth he had once or twice had personal dealings with horses, always unhappy. As a boy he had been sent by his father to a riding-school for a treat. At the second lesson he had had the misfortune to be mounted on a horse which was called Conqueror and had been trained with the yeomanry to lie down and act as cover while his rider fired over him. While the horses were walking round the school and the instructor was explaining to the pupils the method of making a horse walk sideways, and how to open a gate in the hunting-field, the young Albert Bell fell into one of those dreams of future happiness which all his life betrayed him, and let the reins hang loose. The horse Conqueror, perhaps reviving old memories, perhaps sensitive to neglect, lay down quietly, but without warning, on its side, and deposited Albert on the tan, but did not break his leg. With the experience gained in six lessons of this kind, Albert was later persuaded to attempt a number of gentle animals at an uncle's farm.

None of them shook his conviction that the horse was a capricious, cunning, and evil-minded animal, and that he himself had no special genius for its control. On the contrary, he found himself positively a corrupting influence; for however gentle and well-behaved they had been before, no sooner was Albert on their backs than some imp of mischief seemed to possess them, and animals called 'ladies' horses', with a reputation for temperance enjoyed for years, were guilty of acts of violence and folly which astonished the ladies accustomed to ride them. His aunt's white mare, irreverently named by the family the 'Palfrey', was not known to have a weakness, unless it could be called a weakness to halt by the roadside from time to time to eat grass. His aunt had never discouraged this little habit, but Albert conceived it to be humiliating, and endeavoured to correct it by hauling up the Palfrey's head. The Palfrey retaliated, to the general surprise, by walking backwards very quickly, snorting unpleasantly, until it was allowed to eat again. At an annual rally of the Boy Scouts at which he found himself (by accident) on horseback, Albert thought it undignified that his mount should stand with her head in the grass while the band was playing the National Anthem; and, ignoring the warnings of experience, he tried to persuade her into a more erect and military position. The Palfrey immediately walked backwards in an uncontrollable manner into the heart of the Scouts' band, where she put one hind foot through the big drum and brought the National Anthem to a premature conclusion. Albert's aunt was convinced that the strange conduct of the Palfrey was due to some peculiar defect in Albert's management, and Albert did not know what to think. But from that moment he determined to have no more to do with the incalculable creatures.

All this is important because of the strange faith in horses which he acquired in later life; and not only in horses, but in the ability of mankind to predict their future actions by reference to their past. In the *Sunday Gazette* were the advertisements of several gentlemen who had this power, and were anxious to use it for the enrichment of others. Among these was one named 'Steve Merry', who had Mr. Bell's particular confidence and custom. 'Steve' sent

secretly to his clients the names of the horses which would be successful in selected races, and the order in which they would finish the course ; and he published each week a list of cases in which these forecasts had proved accurate. 'I will make your fortune,' he said frankly, and Mr. Bell took a kindly view of any one who was prepared to make his fortune. In order to demonstrate his good faith, 'Steve' undertook to send a parcel of forecasts free of charge to gentlemen dealing with him for the first time ; and it was this generous act which had won the custom of Mr. Bell. He accepted the offer, and one out of the six horses named by 'Steve' was, in fact, successful in a race, though Mr. Bell did not, unfortunately, back it, because in that case he thought that he knew better. Still, he was impressed, and now nearly every week a small postal order would go to 'Steve' ; and 'Steve' would send him 'Splendid Doubles' and 'Infallible Naps'. But meanwhile Mr. Bell had himself become a student of 'form', and, forgetful of his youth, believed that it was possible for an ordinary man, by examining closely what a horse had done under such-and-such conditions, to foretell what it would do under different conditions. So he pored most carefully over the column by 'The Seer' in the *Sunday Gazette* in which 'The Seer', after a scientific comparison of the pedigree, history, handicap, jockey, physique, and private idiosyncrasies of the son of Sarpedon with those of the daughter of Cyllene, would definitely decide that if anything should beat the Manton filly it would be Lord Loofah's gelding ; while, for his part, he would not be surprised if Lord Crosstree's nomination flattered his supporters, and very likely the horse which led this to the post would win. It was hard work sometimes to discover from these careful pieces of prose what horse, if any, 'The Seer' himself would back ; but Mr. Bell gave his whole mind to it, and was now able to distinguish with ease the Manton filly from the daughter of Cyllene. Moreover, he had soon begun to form conclusions of his own, which differed sometimes both from those of 'The Seer' and those of 'Steve Merry'. And sometimes, unfortunately, he would trust his own judgment when 'Steve's' turned out to be right ; while often and often, as he would explain to Jane, he had faithfully

followed 'Steve' when if he had only stood by his own opinions he would have won a large sum of money.

It was a disheartening business. Mr. Bell made three or four bets a week, and backed a winner about once a month. But a series of small losses, as he would explain to Lily, was to be expected, and must be cheerfully set off against the chance of heavy gains. For example, there had been Eurydice, the glorious horse (or filly ?) Eurydice, which, backed by Mr. Bell for ten shillings in a reckless moment, had come home a winner at thirty to one. Fifteen pounds odd! This had happened, it is true, some three years earlier, but Mr. Bell still spoke of it as if it had been the day before yesterday. And indeed there still lingered traces of Eurydice to gladden the heart. Lily still wore her Eurydice bangle, and Jane's pearl necklace was Eurydice's too. And every horse which carried Mr. Bell's half-crown was to be another Eurydice.

But that same imp which had possessed the horses of his youth pursued, it seemed, his animals to-day. The hottest favourite of the market, the most 'Infallible Naps' of 'Steve', when backed by Mr. Bell, would mysteriously lose their powers and belie their 'form', or meet with some misfortune which none could have foreseen. They developed coughs at the last minute, or inexplicable swellings at the knees; they crossed their legs or refused to run downhill, or revealed some idiosyncrasy never before suspected. And if they themselves were blameless, a dog ran through their legs, there was dirty work at the corners, or they were 'interfered with' by other horses at the start.

The girls looked on at their father's operations with charity, and even with sympathy. For one thing, they seemed to have some sort of kinship with the pictures. The racecourse, like the pictures, was a world in which, at any moment, the poor and lowly might suddenly be blessed by fortune. Indeed, Jane had often a secret thought that if ever she was to live like the pictures she would owe it, as like as not, to some staggering speculation of her father's; for she could not think of any other agency which was likely to bring it about. None the less, she knew very well how many half-crowns were carried away on the backs of racehorses, which might well have been spent upon the

Blackbird, on food and clothing and a blanket or two, to say nothing of windows. And she was careful to be up when Mr. Bell came home on Friday nights, in order to extract for the housekeeping as much of the weekly wage as it was kind to take from him.

Sometimes, after a month of losses, she would protest, but very mildly. Mr. Bell, who knew his daughter's weakness, would confess his own, but add that what he did, he did very largely for his daughters' sake ; for, things being what they were and the world a hard place, in no other way could he hope to provide them with those luxuries which they deserved. And Jane, who loved her father, would assure him she knew that very well—that, really, she was not complaining, but she did hope that he would have some winners soon. Mr. Bell would reply that he conducted his business with the utmost economy—that, for example, he seldom wasted money on buying an evening paper to ascertain the result of a race, but would hang about till he could get the news by word of mouth from a newsboy at the Broadway ; that she must never forget the case of Eurydice ; and that he had a red-hot tip for the ' three-thirty ' on Tuesday. Jane would say, ' It's quite all right, father,' and kiss him warmly ; and, nerved to greater efforts by this encouragement, Mr. Bell would put five shillings on the ' three-thirty ' instead of half a crown.

Besides, there was the general romance of the distant racecourse, which, though they had never seen, the girls had often imagined—the lords, the crowds, the gaily-coloured jockeys, the motor-cars, the jolly bookmakers, the towering grand-stands, and, heart and centre of it all, the gallant horse which carried their father's fortunes, and, with everything against it, beset by enemies, might still win home and make him happy in the evening. He kept nothing from them. ' What horse are you on, Dad? ' was Lily's morning greeting, and till afternoon there ran a little current of hope about the *Blackbird*. The Manton filly galloped in their thoughts, Lord Loofah's gelding gave colour to the day, and for an hour or two they were partners with the rich.

Each of them had read a book or two. Mr. Bell had a

little row of books saved from the wreckage of his life—some old *Ruff's Guides to the Turf*, *Bends and Hitches*, the *Arabian Nights*, a nautical almanac, *Black Beauty*, *Small-boat Sailing*, *Stories of the Stage*, and a few old detective tales in which wicked murders were committed on the first page and punctually punished on the last through the acumen of an amateur cruelly handicapped by the antiquated methods of Scotland Yard. The girls liked these best, and would sometimes borrow stories of this kind from the Penny Library at Mr. Peacock's tobacco shop, for kind Mr. Peacock let them off the pennies. They had read large parts of the *Arabian Nights*, but thought them less meaty than the *Sunday Gazette* and not so well written. They expected literature to be as spasmodic as the pictures, as pithy as the *Gazette*, and served in lozenges like the learning on the wireless. They enjoyed long words, but could not endure long sentences. So they did not waste money on books. But lately Lily had joined a syndicate of girl friends which bought and circulated selected volumes in the 'Paper Library of Passion Tales', and these were well worth the twopence.

Mr. Bell took them to church on Christmas Day, when there was no Sunday paper to read. The vicar called from time to time, but never found Mr. Bell at home. The girls received him very politely, demurely, and silently, and answered 'Yes' and 'No' in turn. When he hoped that they would be seen at Matins next Sunday, they said that there was much to do on the barge, and they could not tell till their father came home, but they would mention the matter to him, and probably they would come.

Such were the forces of modern civilization which worked upon the daughters of the *Blackbird*. And perhaps it was not surprising if Jane, as Mrs. Green had said, was neither one thing nor the other. But, considering what happened to Lily and Jane and how many authorities had wished to interfere with them, it may be thought odd that no one tried to protect them from the pictures, or the *Sunday Gazette*, or the speculative dealings of Mr. Bell.

IV

THE 'BLACK SWAN'

LILY said that her father was making up to Mrs. Higgins of the 'Black Swan'. Jane did not know about that, though she thought it might be likely, after the surprising publication which she had found in her father's cabin. But she said nothing about that.

On the Thursday her father took her to the 'Black Swan', and she began to think that Lily might be right. He had an hour or two to himself between the afternoon and evening performances at the cinema, and he asked her to slip out from the Ravens' and meet him if she could, about six o'clock, for he wished to talk to her, but not before Lily. Nurse was back, so she slipped away successfully. She found her father sitting in the garden by the quoits ground, a mild and bitter and a ginger-beer before him, his pipe in his mouth. He looked melancholy but contented. He had a melancholy, feckless face, with weak blue eyes and a wispy moustache, which was a nuisance with beer. He looked a man of sorrows, and people pitied him in buses. But, as Mrs. Higgins said, he was never one to complain, and everybody liked him at the 'Black Swan'. In the right company he spoke with a stately verbiage, but when at the 'Black Swan' he talked like the 'Black Swan'. They knew that he had come down in the world, and no doubt he knew it, but they could not have told it from his manner. He had no superior ways. So all the quoits-players looked up and said cheerily, 'Good evening, Mr. Bell,' and he felt himself among friends.

The garden of the 'Black Swan' on a summer evening was a friendly and a peaceful place, though every man there was as likely as not to be out of work within a week, or in some way at grips with misfortune. The centre of it was the quoits ground, about the length of a cricket-pitch, on which the 'Black Swan' team was now doing battle with the 'Lord Nelson' visiting-team from Putney. An

ancient, heroic, dignified game, like something in the Iliad or an English Aeneid. The quoits were massive pieces of iron, weighing, in the best matches, some sixteen pounds. At either end of the ground were square pits of clay, and in the centre of them a small buried peg. The matches were a series of single combats; each man had two quoits, and the game was twenty points. The full match might last for hours. Old Ned, the waterman, was pitted now against a huge constable from Putney—massive men both, with the judgment of philosophers and the backs and muscles of Titans. No chickens could play this game. Each man had at the target end a sort of second, or adviser, who with slips of paper would mark the position of the peg or the strategic spot where they would have the quoit fall. These had strange technical cries and whimsical fashions of encouragement. 'Come on, lad,' cried Boulter from the waterworks to the veteran Ned. 'Don't be afraid, boy. This is where I want you.' And stooping, he pegged with a forefinger a white slip of paper in the narrow inch of clay between the two quoits which lay by the peg already. 'You've nothing to fear, lad. Let her go!'

One foot forward, Old Ned balanced his huge frame, his wide, wise forehead glistening in the sun with sweat. He swung his arm back—everything was in the balance and the swing—took one step forward, and with an elephantine grace flung the great quoit high in the air—a thing, thought Mr. Bell, to split the skull of any man that stood beneath it. But Boulter still crouched confident over the mark, knowing his man. And the quoit fell between his knees, plumb on the mark, splitting and burying the slip of paper and dividing the two other quoits.

'That's my beauty!' said Boulter to the unshaven old hero, and a murmur of praise ran along the loyal watchers of the 'Black Swan'. Then came the policeman's second, with his slip of paper and his own strange language. The policeman's throw was not so true, but when he walked to the other end with Ned—two Hectors, two Robin Hoods—they found the four quoits overlapping in a narrow, miraculous ring.

Along each side ran a low wooden rail and benches, and on the rail was a shelf for the elbow and the beer. Here

sat a score or more of the neighbours with their harmless glasses, sunning themselves after the day's work, watermen talking of tides and the selling of boats, one or two of those artists watching the game, wives discussing with relish the trials of life, while their dogs and children ran loose about the garden. Mr. Bell surveyed the scene with contentment, for he was a companionable man and lonely, and it brought company to his soul. He thought how strangely like a village was this corner of London, where there were true neighbours still, and simple sports in the open air. And he thought how strange were those Temperance folk who could see in all this nothing but 'alcohol', for whom this ancient meeting-place of the poor was no more than a drinking-den. He had heard from Mrs. Higgins that she was worried about her licence; for she had heard that these same folk were working up for another 'assault' on 'redundant' licences in the neighbourhood, and if the licences were reduced it would be the small houses that went, for there was more profit to the brewers in the gaudy gin-palaces in King Street, and it did not matter if the little house was fifteenth century, and had quoits in the garden—to those folks it was 'alcohol', and one of these days the 'Black Swan' would go as the 'Waterman' had gone.

Then, as Lily had suspected, he thought very kindly of Mrs. Higgins. And he thought of himself, very pleasantly, as master of the 'Black Swan'. It would be no mean thing to preside over this respectable house, which caused so much pleasure and so little harm, to be a sort of leader among these friendly people who knew him, close to the river and the *Blackbird* (which he had always said was an omen). And though he knew he could not manage a theatre or a family, he was sure that with Mrs. Higgins's help he could manage a pub.

Besides, he was lonely. Once or twice, lately, when Jane had sat on his bed in her nightgown, to talk about housekeeping and kiss him good night, he had thought what a fine, pretty girl she had grown; she might marry any day, and then there would be no one to keep Lily in order. In the end even Lily would go, and then he would be all alone. He had thought once or twice of Mrs. Higgins, but he had

no money, and who was he to propose marriage to the 'Black Swan'? Then he had played with the plan of advertising for a 'Widow Without Encumbrances', as shy men did, he knew. He bought a paper called the *Marriage Mart* and found five pages full of 'Energetic Spinsters' and 'Refined Widows' anxious to meet with a view to matrimony, genuine, sincere, respectable, domesticated, fond of music and all the rest of it. The paper fascinated him, and indeed its system had a certain kinship with the hobby of his life; one by one he read through the long columns of descriptions with the same attention which he gave to a list of racehorses or 'The Seer's' estimate of form, though he did not forget that in this case the estimates had been prepared by the competitors themselves. There were two or three entries which took his fancy, but none which provoked him to invest in a reply. Instead, he composed a modest description of his own character and circumstances and sent it to the editor.

The *Marriage Mart* came out on Thursday, and he had the paper in his pocket now; and while he was waiting he could not resist taking it from his pocket and reading his contribution again, with a gambler's interest and an author's pride.

Jane slipped into the seat beside him without a word, and drank her ginger-beer at a gulp. Then, 'What's that, father?' she said, looking over his shoulder. But she saw at once what it was, and with Lily's suggestion in her mind, her own fantastic suspicion returned. Mr. Bell flushed guiltily.

'Father!' said Jane, 'you're not—you're not *advertising*!'

Mr. Bell was too fond of his daughter to lie to her, so he pointed uncomfortably to his composition. Jane read it, horrified. 'Poor father,' she said. 'Advertising! Whatever is the matter with you?'

'You talk as if it was a disease,' said Mr. Bell, a little annoyed. 'It's for your sakes, Jane, you and Lily. You need a mother.'

'You do, father,' said Jane kindly, 'but we're all right.'

'You're all right, Jane; but Lily's going wild.'

'I know,' said Jane, thinking of Lily's recent remarks.

It was Early Closing day, and Heaven knew who Lily was with, and what she was doing.

'She ought to go to work.'

'I know,' said Jane again. 'But Lily don't like work.'

'I've been wondering,' said Mr. Bell. 'We might sell the barge and go to Liverpool. Your aunt could look after you, and I could get work.'

'I'd rather have a mother, thanks. I don't want to leave the barge, father. I love the old barge.'

'The Mersey's a fine river,' said Mr. Bell feebly.

'Should we live on a barge, father?'

'No. Your aunt wouldn't live on a barge.'

'Well, I won't go to Liverpool. I don't know about Lily.'

Lily did not love the barge as well as Jane, for there was always something to be done which Lily ought to have done, and had not.

'Well, it's one thing or the other,' said Mr. Bell with an attempt at firmness.

'Well, if we must have a mother,' said Jane, 'I won't have one out of an advertisement. So there!'

'All right, Jane,' said Mr. Bell sadly, and he put the incriminating paper in his pocket. 'It was foolishness, and I didn't really mean it. It was for your sake. I'm worried, Jane. I've been unlucky this week.'

It was many weeks, Jane knew, since Mr. Bell had had a lucky week.

'Why don't you give it up, father?' she said gently.

'It's all an investment, Jane. At any moment I may strike it lucky. Remember Eurydice?'

'Yes, father,' said Jane, who knew she should be angry, but, as usual, was only sorry.

'I've a first-class tip for the Derby,' said Mr. Bell, and was silent, watching the door of the kitchen, for at this hour, sometimes, Mrs. Higgins took the air.

'I wish you had a mother, Jane,' he said at last.

Jane was more sorry for him still, and although she had no wish for a mother, she said, 'Well, father, isn't there any one you like? What about—well, what about Mrs. Higgins, or some one?'

Mr. Bell flushed again, but with pleasure, and Jane felt

the satisfaction of a mother who has given her child a successful treat.

'I can't, Jane—not without money. But I've got a plan,' said Mr. Bell dreamily. 'I've got a plan. You're a good girl, Jane,' and he squeezed her hand.

Jane was touched by his emotion, but she wondered what new insanity was in his mind, and she was about to ask particulars of the plan, when Mrs. Higgins appeared at the kitchen doorway.

'Well, I must get back,' said Jane, 'and lay the dinner. See you to-night, father. Be good.' She kissed him and added, against her better judgment, 'Best of luck!' And, with romantic imaginations, she departed. 'Weak,' she thought, 'we're all weak.'

'What will you have, Mrs. Higgins?' said Mr. Bell, rising gallantly.

'Thank you, Mr. Bell. Mine's a port and lemonade.'

She sat down beside him, and, queen-like, surveyed her domain, bowing to the quoits players and beaming at the wives, while Mr. Bell ordered her strange refreshment.

Emily Higgins was a comely widow of forty, and, truth to tell, a little too youthful and gentle in appearance to be the convincing mistress of a public-house. Sometimes, even with Harold's assistance, she had difficulty in clearing the bar at closing-time so promptly as the law requires. And at these times, though not at many others, she felt the loss of Higgins.

Like Mr. Bell she had had her troubles. For many years she had served behind the bar at a West London theatre, till Higgins won her heart during a play which was too deep for him. Together they made the 'Black Swan' prosper, but Mr. Higgins had Mr. Bell's disease, and gambled, more grandly still, on the Stock Exchange. He died in debt, a strong Conservative, who hated all newfangled nonsense and was killed in a one-way street.

'Well, here's all you wish yourself, Mr. Bell!' she said. 'That girl of yours is a pretty thing. She and Ernest are quite thick, I believe.'

'I'm glad,' said Mr. Bell. A double wedding, he reflected. He and Mrs. Higgins, Ernest and Jane. 'Those girls need a mother,' he went on, gazing at his glass.

Mrs. Higgins eyed him sideways, but made no reply. Like Jane, against her better judgment, she had a weakness for Mr. Bell, and found in his fecklessness and modesty a pitiful charm. But, as Mr. Bell had guessed, she needed money more sorely than a man.

'How are your troubles?' said Mr. Bell at last, using a formula which was common at the 'Black Swan'.

'Mustn't grumble,' she said; and this was commoner still. 'Ernest is a worry. Last Sunday he spoke in Hyde Park. But he's a good lad,' she concluded with a sigh.

Ernest, to the horror of his parents, had turned into a Socialist, and belonged to the League of Red Youth.

She went on to speak of the Temperance folk, who were prowling and prowling around, like the hosts of Midian, and now she was haunted by a fear that they would pounce and destroy the 'Black Swan' before she had put anything by.

'Mind you, it isn't every one I say that to, Mr. Bell, but I know very well it won't go no further.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Bell, 'I'm proud of the confidence.'

Old Ned was still performing prodigies of valour. Mr. Peacock from the tobacco shop had come in in his white collar and neat clothes. Mr. Bryan, the artist, much less tidy, was next to him, and they were both arguing about the qualities of a boat which was for sale with Andrew the ferryman. Beyond them was a Civil Servant who had come in to buy ginger-beer and had stayed to watch the game. The sun had tipped the roofs to the west, and the garden wore a golden glow.

'I wish,' said Mrs. Higgins, eyeing her kingdom with a gentle bitterness, 'these Mr. Busies would spend an evening in this garden, or even in the bar, and then turn round and tell me I'm a haunt of wickedness. Do you ever see a man go off these premises the worse for his glass, Mr. Bell? Did you ever see Old Ned reeling home in his cups?'

'I can't say that I did.'

'Not once in a month of Sundays. It isn't for the beer they come here, I always say, Mr. Bell—well, they come for that, of course, I won't tell no lies, but it's the company and the conversation that draws them just as much. As

I said to Mr. Peacock yesterday, this house is the poor man's Carlton, I said, and the Carlton has no trouble about licences, that I will swear. And I can prove my words,' said Mrs. Higgins, now generously warmed by her convictions. 'You see that family over there, Mr. Bell—the Palmers, I mean, three brothers, father, and mother? They used to live along the road at River Villas, Mr. Bell. The boys was born there, and now they're scattered over the length and breadth of London and two of them married. They come here every Thursday of their lives for a little family reunion, and white collars, too, all of them. There's many another I could mention too that come here regular for the conversation, though they've left the neighbourhood and it costs them a penny tram ride; well, it can't be the beer that brings them, because if it was only that they could get it at every corner, but wild horses wouldn't drag some of them into that gin-palace in King Street. And there's old Andrew, can't hardly walk, but here he is three nights a week, though he passes three houses on the way. Well, do you mean to tell me, Mr. Bell, that it's the beer that brings him?'

'It isn't the beer,' said Mr. Bell gravely, 'so much as the bonhomy.'

'You've hit it,' said Mrs. Higgins with approval. 'And, if you ask me, there's more harm done by betting on horses than what there is done by the drink.'

'I dare say you're right,' said Mr. Bell guardedly, for by a sure instinct he had never spoken of his racing investments to Mrs. Higgins, and he did not know how much she knew.

'Yet one they call the sport of kings,' she continued, 'and the other's the poor man's wickedness. Sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander, I say. It's the old story. One law for the rich and another for the poor. If it was this golf they played in the garden instead of quoits, it would be a different pair of shoes, believe me. There's many a rich man behaving himself this living minute a lot worse than you'll see in my bar, Mr. Bell, and no bother about licences, or hours neither. Good evening, Mrs. Paddock. And how's the world using you?'

'We musn't grumble, Mrs. Higgins. Paddock's leg's

bad again, can't go to work; and they've took Ethel to the infirmary. Scarlet fever.'

'Go on?'

'Come on sudden Saturday evening.'

'Poor little mite! Going on all right?'

'Nicely, thank you. Well, it might have been worse, I say.'

'Just what I was saying to Mr. Bell here. You never know when you're lucky, do you?'

'That's right. Well, I must get back to Paddock with his medicine.'

'A drop of what he fancies? Well, there's nothing better. Anything I can do, Mrs. Paddock, you know you've only got to ask?'

'I know that, Mrs. Higgins, and thank you kindly. Good evening. Good evening, Mr. Bell.'

The woman shambled off with her jug, leaving Mr. Bell with the warm inward glow which was often kindled in him by the courage and kindness of his neighbours in trouble. Mrs. Higgins, he knew, lent money to many of them, and seldom at interest.

'It's a hard world, Mr. Bell,' said Mrs. Higgins, and they mused in silence about that.

'You and me have a good deal in common, Mrs. Higgins,' said Mr. Bell cautiously at last.

'We've both had our ups and downs, Mr. Bell, if that's what you mean.'

'More downs than ups in my case,' said Mr. Bell. 'But I'm hoping for better things. I've got a plan,' he said mysteriously.

'Go on?' said Mrs. Higgins, mystified.

'I'm expecting,' said Mr. Bell, weighing his words, 'a windfall—a very considerable windfall.'

'Well, I hope you may get it, Mr. Bell.'

Mr. Bell waited a moment, and then said, 'Did you ever think of marrying again?'

Mrs. Higgins faced him full and examined him, so that he blushed.

'Not without it did good to the business,' she said deliberately. 'Well, what I mean, not without he brought a little capital, Mr. Bell. It wouldn't be right.'

'Just what I thought,' said Mr. Bell, and nodded sagely and returned to his glass. He had done all that in the circumstances a man could do. And Mrs. Higgins's next remark showed, he thought, that his intentions had an interest for her.

'How soon would you be expecting your windfall, Mr. Bell?'

'Two or three weeks,' said Mr. Bell airily.

'Well, I wish you luck. And now I must take the bar and let Harold have his supper. Good evening, Mr. Bell.'

And Mr. Bell was left with his mild and bitter, brooding over his plan.

V

ERNEST

THE next day, being Friday, Jane went out with Ernest Higgins. Ernest was lean and lanky, good-looking but sharp-looking, with small, quick, bird-like eyes. Ernest was in the service of the Underground Railways, and at present was employed at Down Street Station, sometimes on the platform, and sometimes working the lifts. He was a stern, unbending Socialist, and on and under the lapels of his coat were the buttons and badges of various leagues which were sworn to fraternity and bloodshed. He was Organizing Secretary to the Hammersmith Branch of the League of Red Youth. Jane had met him first at Baron's Court Station, when for a short time she took the Ravens' children to kindergarten. Baron's Court is a draughty station, and had helped to embitter Ernest. He put in for a transfer, and was moved to Down Street. Down Street had done him no good, for at Down Street there was too little to do, and he saw too many of the rich. Few people used the station except the residents of Mayfair and persons on their way to the Piccadilly clubs, where, Ernest suspected, they would eat too much.

A peculiar type of military officer was frequent in his lift, and after enquiry Ernest found to his horror that he was daily assisting to and from their food the less opulent members of the Cavalry Club. The station was lonely and had yellow tiles, and every second train flashing through made it look lonelier and yellower. He served no passenger whom he regarded as a worker, and very few who were fit to live; while the trains full of clerks and typists which passed him gave him small comfort, for they were all part of the capitalist system, and the capitalist was an open sore in his tender soul. There were long periods when no one wanted the lift at all; the lift had a little desk for the issue of tickets, and he would sit at this and gloomily read

translations of continental works concerned with the iniquity and abolition of the capitalist system.

Down Street confirmed his faith. But what had first set him against capitalism was a youthful experience of mass-production, which had also been his first experience of work. He had been employed in a toffee factory. For seven hours a day he stood beside a moving band which carried past him an endless chain of toffee-tins upside down. It was Ernest's duty to pick up each tin, reverse it, and replace it the right way up. After some months he decided, very rightly, that this was not a good way of spending the day. He did not know what he had done when he had done it, and whatever it was, he did not feel that that was what he was for. Whenever Ernest talked about this experience Jane felt that he was talking sense, for it sounded like stair-rods and washing-up. But of the rest of his talk there was very little that sounded sense.

Fred said too little when he took a girl out; Ernest said too much. His talk was a strange mixture of Nationalisation and Love, neither quite convincing. Yet Jane was ready to be convinced and anxious to be carried away. He had a dream, she could see, however vague, and having a vague dream herself, she liked him for that. And she did her best to picture the misty 'Commonwealth' he spoke of, in which, she gathered, there was to be no more washing-up, or, if there were, it would be done by herself and Mrs. Raven alternately; and Florry would love her and she would love Florry, and Florry would enjoy answering the door, because she would be working for the State and not for a brutal private employer. She liked the long words Ernest used, and when he told her she was an 'economic thrall' or a 'woman of the proletariat', she felt important. But she did not know what he meant, and whenever they came down to what he meant, which could not always be avoided, she was baffled. Then she would argue, and this annoyed him.

To-night she was a little late again, and Ernest was a little wild, as Fred had not been; but it was rather temper than passion, she thought. He was waiting at the corner of the passage by the water-works, under the oak-tree. Ernest preferred this place to the elm, because it was

darker; there was a fence on both sides. But it had rained that afternoon, the trees dripped on Ernest, and there was a puddle in the corner. Ernest wore a bowler hat and a dark blue tie with white spots.

'Sorry I'm late, Ernest,' said Jane. 'I was kept.'

'Who by?' said Ernest suspiciously.

'Mrs. Raven had company.'

'What right has she got——' growled Ernest. 'Well, it serves you right. I've told you before you ought to chuck it. A domestic servant's no better than a bond-slave.' If there was one piece of capitalism which angered Ernest more than another, it was the spectacle of a domestic servant.

'I thought you was all for service?' said Jane, dimly recalling some slogan of that kind.

'All for service, and none for profit, I said.'

'Well, that's me,' said Jane. 'God knows I don't get much profit out of it.'

'The service of the many, not of the few,' snapped Ernest.

'Well, I dunno, I'd sooner serve a few people I know than a lot of people I don't.'

'You've got a *bourgeois* psychology, Jane. That's what's the matter with you.'

'You're standing in a puddle,' said Jane.

They moved away from the puddle and Jane said, 'What's that, Ernest?'

'What's what?'

'What you said I'd got. The *borjwaw* thing.'

'You don't think proletarian. You think like the bosses. You ought to say to yourself, night and morning, "Boss is boss, and class is class, and proletariat is proletariat. And I'm proletariat." But you don't. They've got you, body and soul.'

'Who's got me, Ernest?' said Jane, knitting her brows.

'The bosses. Body and soul.'

"I don't see that, Ernest. I like Mrs. Raven,' she added irrelevantly.

'There you go again. There's no liking between class and class. That's how they dope you. You've got to be class-conscious, Jane.'

'What's that, Ernest?'

'Class is class,' said Ernest, 'and ever more shall be so. Your boss is one class and you're another. And her class is against your class. We're out to down capitalism, and the *bourgeois* is the parasite of the capitalist state, and he that is not for us is against us. See?'

'That don't sound sense,' said Jane. 'You might as well say that he that is not against us is for us.'

'So he is,' said Ernest incautiously.

'Well, I don't see that,' said Jane. 'You might as well say that a man who wasn't knocking you down was in love with you.'

'You don't know what you're talking about,' said Ernest shortly.

'That's why I'm asking you,' said Jane, knitting her brows. 'Are my bosses *borjwaw*?'

'That's right. Parasites.'

'Well, Mr. Raven works for the Government. I thought you wanted every one to work for the Government.'

'A Workers' Government. He don't produce nothing.'

'Well, they've produced three children, and that's more than many can say.'

'Capitalist spawn,' said Ernest.

'Come to that, Ernest, what do *you* produce?'

Ernest was silent. It was difficult to say exactly what he produced at Down Street tube station. A little weary of argument, he remembered suddenly that he was by way of courting Jane, and that, in the heat of Socialism, he had forgotten to kiss her. He put his arms round her and kissed her violently and long, more violently than ever before—perhaps because she had teased him and provoked him with her arguments, and this was a way of showing her what was what.

And it has to be admitted that, high-minded as he was politically and moved by the noblest aspirations for the betterment of man, Ernest had not, where women were concerned, that purity of thought which might have been expected.

Jane yielded herself to this hot embrace, but, hanging passive in his arms, was not quite sure what she thought of it. This indeed, was how she had hoped that Fred would hug her, and it was certainly more like the pictures, but

she wondered if it was Love's Bliss and decided that it was not. After a little she withdrew her lips, breathless, and when he pursued them still turned her face from side to side, innocently trying to escape him. But this, she found, inflamed him more; she struggled, his bowler hat fell off, but at last he held her closer than before. She was afraid now that she liked it, but felt that she should not.

A heavy drop from the oak-tree fell on the back of Ernest's neck, and he released her.

'You ought not to kiss me like that,' said Jane seriously.

'Why not?'

'It isn't right'; and suddenly she laughed.

'What are you laughing at?'

'Would you say an artist was a *borjwaw*—a painter, I mean?'

'Artists are *bourgeois* if they have a capitalist mentality,' said Ernest, 'but there'll be room for them in the Workers' State.'

Jane chuckled again. She was thinking of Mr. Bryan and wondering what Ernest would say if he knew that she had been kissed by a *borjwaw*.

He divined that she was laughing at him, and took a crushing hold of her again. And so they stood, locked together in the muddy corner.

The tree dripped softly upon them, and soon there began a gentle patter in the leaves, for the rain had returned. Ernest, not content with his conquests, began to paw about. Then Jane whispered an angry word, and thrust him away, for it was only yesterday that she had spoken to Lily about letting boys paw her about.

'Leave me alone,' she said, setting her hat straight. 'Let's go to the pictures.'

'I don't want to go to the pictures.'

'Well, if you can't behave yourself—— Besides, it's raining.'

The rain was gathering force, and Ernest unwillingly consented, being indeed on fire. But he picked up his bowler hat and walked decorously beside her to the picture-house, explaining on the way the general arguments for the Nationalisation of the Means of Production, Distribution, and Exchange. Jane said nothing, for she was

wishing secretly that they had stayed under the tree, and she was shocked at herself for wishing it. She felt naughty and weak and trembly, and she took Ernest's arm. Ernest pressed it to his side and said, 'What I want you to get into your head, little Jane, is this idea of the Socialist Commonwealth. Sort of big brotherhood, you see.'

Jane wondered what would be the position of the little sisters.

The picture-house was a brand-new structure of great magnificence, the kind of building which one imagines that Dido built for a temple at Carthage. It had a Palladian façade in shiny green stone, lit with electric torches in black. Far down the main road it glared like a fire. The entrance-hall had a tessellated floor, a Moorish roof in gold, and innumerable flunkeys in silver and dark blue. Jane grandly presented her pass, they were given two one-and-threepennies, and passed up a long staircase carpeted in lush red velvet. Ernest kissed her at the corner, but this was a gentle, Socialist kiss, and quite nice, Jane thought. But she said firmly, 'Now, that's enough.'

The auditorium, if such it could be called, was like a cathedral, a cathedral designed by a drunken architect after reading the *Arabian Nights*. Far up in either wall was a towering green arch, as if the drunkard had intended to build a transept, but, forgetting the transept, had filled in the arch with black marble. And down both sides ran massive columns in the same green stone, supporting with smaller arches an imaginary clerestory. The roof was a vault of blue mosaic, and in it, when the lights were up, shone a million stars. The vast proscenium arch, flanked by two alabaster pillars, had three sets of velvet curtains which rolled aside in succession to reveal the name of the film, the censor's licence, and the names of the principal performers. On the north side was a great organ; there was an orchestra of thirty-two, with two grand pianos.

In this temple of the 'Shadow Drama' sat two or three thousand humble people, inhaling romance and American culture, sucking sweets, holding hands, and thoroughly happy. For their one-and-threepence the two young things had slip-up fauteuils in plush, more comfortable than the most expensive stalls in the richest theatre. The principal

drama of the evening had just begun, and they followed to their seats an invisible handmaid with an electric eye which led them miraculously through the darkness like the pillar of fire.

Ernest was impressed and silent. He despised the pictures, not because they were bad art but because they were capitalist art. True, they made the workers happy, but even this annoyed him faintly, for it was only one more subtle device of the capitalist for the drugging of the proletariat.

A woman behind them, who had seen the picture before, explained to her friend both what was happening and what was about to happen, so they were able to follow the drama with ease. Ernest saw on the screen a young blonde woman in capitalist dress who seemed to be the heroine. 'All this,' thought Ernest, 'will have to go.' The young woman was moping over her childhood's toys, which she took out of an old chest. She was kneeling on the floor, and now and then rolled down her cheeks a hot tear of glycerine, for the toys reminded her of Richard Lee, the young Britisher who had been her nursery playmate. But most she wept over a doll in sailor's dress, for it looked like Richard. But Richard was in England, and Nancy was at a whaling-station in Alaska, and her father wanted her to marry a dark man named Samuel Siggs, who held a mortgage on the house. Her father was a retired whaler, and a Quaker, and now he was old and ill, so Nancy wished to please him. But suddenly the sailor-doll seemed to speak, and it said:

'*I am coming to you, Nancy.*'

The doll swelled and grew to life-size, till it filled the whole screen, and the woman behind Ernest said that really you could have sworn it was speaking. Then the doll grew more and more like the photograph of Richard which Nancy had in a locket round her neck, and Jane said wasn't it wonderful the way they did these things. But Ernest was wondering whether he should hold Jane's hand and how he should do it, for she was sitting remotely in the far corner of her seat. The girl in front of him had her head on her friend's shoulder, and he wished that Jane would put her head on his shoulder; but Jane

appeared to have views about behaviour, and he was afraid that he had gone too far in the passage. So Nancy decided that she would not marry Siggs, whatever happened; her father was angry, and went to bed very ill, but she was adamant, and thought of Richard. Ernest put out his hand cautiously, but could not find Jane's hand, so he laid his hand on Jane's knee; Jane moved her knee, and the hand fell off. Nancy's father sent for Siggs, and gave him his daughter's hand in marriage. Jane nudged Ernest and said, 'There's father.' Ernest said, 'I know'; but Jane said, 'My father, I mean.' And, looking over to the right, Ernest saw dimly Mr. Bell in the orchestra, playing the 'cello. He was playing the 'Preislied' from the Meistersinger, though Jane did not know that; but she knew that it was the love-tune, because Nancy was thinking of Richard again. And when she nudged Ernest he had caught hold of her hand which now he was holding tightly under the arm of the seat between them. Jane's hand was cool and small, but Ernest's was hot and damp. Two days later Richard sailed into the harbour, and asked for Nancy's hand in marriage. Her father said, 'Thee hast not harpooned a whale, lad,' for the man who married his daughter must have harpooned a whale, or he was not a man. Ernest liked this part, because it showed up the *bourgeois* Richard who had never harpooned a whale, and was not a worker.

But Richard said he would harpoon a whale, and go with the expedition. Then the old man said, 'But thee is not a Quaker, lad.' But Richard was ready for anything, and said he would be a Quaker. Ernest's hand grew hotter and hotter, Jane's was clammy, and her wrist was sore against the metal arm of the seat. She tried to draw her hand away, but Ernest held on, so she drew his hand gently on to her knee, which was more comfortable, though Ernest took this as a mark of affection. Then Siggs followed Nancy into a wood, and said if she would not be his he would do something about the mortgage, and that would upset her poor sick father. Nancy bit her lips, but she said she would not be his. And all the time Richard was creeping up closer, behind trees, because an old retainer had followed Siggs into the wood, and then

run off and told Richard. But Siggs did not know this, so he said that if Nancy would not be his she would lose her honour, so she might as well be his and save trouble. And Nancy said she would not lose her honour for any one, but she looked worried, and bit her lips again. And Ernest moved his knee an inch or two, and put his knee against Jane's knee.

Jane thought she would move her knee away, and then she thought, 'Well, what does it matter?' and left her knee where it was. So at the last minute Richard came up and knocked Siggs down. Siggs was discomfited, and Richard kissed Nancy and made faces, and Ernest's knee grew still more affectionate; but the next night Siggs and a gang knocked Richard on the head and hid him in the hold in irons, and the next morning the ship sailed for the whaleries. Then there was an interval and the lights went up.

During the interval Ernest bought a shilling box of chocolates, and they both looked round to see if there was any one they knew in the seats behind them. Jane tried to catch her father's eye, and thought that he was looking more melancholy than usual.

When the lights went out again it was the whaling expedition, Jane's father played whale music, and Ernest made no bones about it. He put his arm through Jane's and held her hand, and his knee against her knee, and his foot against her foot; and so they sat in the darkness, knee to knee and toe to toe, but Ernest's hand was very hot, and Jane's was a little sticky from the chocolates. Siggs, who was the mate, kept Richard hidden in a small cabin in the hold and fed him every other day on little bits of bread. Richard grew very wan and constantly bit his lips. But he kept thinking of Nancy, and Jane's father played the Preislied. Then there was a mutiny against Siggs, Richard was let out, and Siggs was put in the hold instead; but Richard saw that he had the best of everything. Jane said, 'Change hands, I've got the cramp,' and took another chocolate. They sighted whales and Richard harpooned a whale at the first attempt. Ernest sniffed at this, because Richard was a blackleg and did not know his job. But he did not feel strongly about

it, for he was thinking of Jane. He leaned his head towards Jane and touched her hair. Jane was sleepy from the smoky air, and she thought she might as well be friendly as not, so she leaned her head against Ernest's head. It was very uncomfortable, and Ernest had pins and needles in the leg, but he would not move. The whale was pursued and killed and cut up, and Jane's father's forehead was shiny from the energy of the music, but Jane did not take in this part of the story, for she was thinking. She thought that this knee business was a strange way of love-making, but still it was a new experience, though it did not thrill her, like Mr. Bryan's kiss. She remembered that Ernest did not know anything about Fred, and that Fred knew nothing about Ernest, and she thought that perhaps she was on the way to trouble. She let her head fall on to Ernest's shoulder, because that was more comfortable; but Ernest thought it was passion, and gripped her hand. She wondered again if this was Love's Bliss, but thought not; she was afraid of Ernest, and drawn by Ernest, and he made her feel naughty, but perhaps that was all.

On the way back to the whaling-station there was a great storm and Richard saved the ship. But during the storm Siggs escaped from the hold and swam ashore. He rode home on horseback and told Nancy that Richard was dead. Nancy's father was now at the point of death, and to ease his last moments she said she would marry Siggs. Ernest whispered, 'Do you like me, Jane?' and Jane said, 'Yes,' but she added, 'a little bit.' When Richard had saved the ship he found out that Siggs had escaped. He guessed that the man's intentions were not honourable, and galloped through the rain to the meeting-house. Just at the same time Nancy was driving through the rain to her wedding, and so much rain music made Mr. Bell hotter than ever. But Richard had farther to go, and the Quaker wedding was begun without him. Jane was very sleepy, her head ached from the whale music, and she closed her eyes. But just as Nancy was biting her lips in an agony because the time had come for her to say the fatal words which would make her Mrs. Siggs, Richard was seen staggering through the tempest up the drive, for

his horse had been tripped up by an accomplice of Siggs. Nancy threw a glance of hatred at her bridegroom, and a tree was blown down just in front of Richard. Ernest had no sympathy with the *bourgeois* Richard, so he closed his eyes too, and Jane fell asleep. Richard spurned the tree and went on; Nancy opened her mouth to say the first fatal word, and then Richard's face was seen at the window. Nancy began to shut her mouth, but just in time Richard smashed the window and entered the meeting-house. He told the congregation about Siggs, every one was indignant, Siggs made faces, and it was arranged that Richard should marry Nancy there and then. When Nancy's father heard that Richard had harpooned a whale and married his daughter he became a new man, and left his bed at once, for he had never really liked Siggs. Richard said he would pay off the mortgage with his share of the whale, and their lips met in a long kiss. Mr. Bell played the love-tune, the great organ joined in, and Ernest opened his eyes. He nudged Jane, Jane woke up, and they looked at the long kiss together. The organ played Mendelssohn's Wedding March, and Ernest looked at Jane and said, 'You and me, eh?'

The lights were up, and Jane looked at Ernest, considering. He was good-looking, certainly, though he had small eyes and a greedy mouth, and his hands were damp. She thought this must be her first proposal of marriage, and felt kindly towards Ernest. But the strange thing was that at that moment she thought of Mr. Bryan. She said, 'Well, I dunno, Ernest.'

A voice behind Jane said nastily, 'May I pass, please?' They stood up hurriedly, very stiff, and Ernest rubbed his leg where the pins and needles were. Ernest wanted to walk home by the river, but that would have taken them through the passage, so Jane chose King Street and River Road, though that was longer. Ernest was annoyed and said nothing at all till they came to the little gate in the fence beside the wharf which was Jane's front door. Then he cheered up; the rain had stopped, no one was about, and he prepared to kiss her. Jane was just wondering whether she would let him kiss her again, and thinking that perhaps she would not, for she was enjoying a new

sensation of power, when they heard in the still night strange sounds of music.

'The love-tune!' whispered Ernest, who found this miraculous.

'The cornet!' whispered Jane, astonished.

She slipped through the little gate and on to the moonlit wharf, Ernest behind her, and softly they picked their way through the litter of packing-cases, barbed wire, corrugated iron, and the wreckage of old boats, and stood looking down on the *Blackbird*.

On the main-hatch of the *Blackbird*, facing the river, sat Mr. Bell, with his cornet, trying to play the 'Preislied' to the Hammersmith stars, baying the young moon with Wagner. He played in a muffled way, as soft as a cornet can play. The sound was weird and melancholy, and to Jane the whole scene was frightening, for she had never seen her father do such a thing before. Was this an indiscreet tribute to Mrs. Higgins? Was it madness, or what was it?

'Well, father?' she said with an anxious note.

Mr. Bell stopped playing, turned his head an inch or two, and said over his shoulder:

'I've lost my job, Jane.'

Then he put the cornet to his lips again, and took up the tune exactly where he had left it.

Jane put her finger to her lips, and waved Ernest away. And Ernest went away quietly without his kiss. He knew the meaning of those terrible words.

VI

THE PLAN

MR. BELL had several excellent reasons for believing that he knew which horse would win the Derby, and on the Sunday following his dismissal he put them to a convincing test.

As to that dismissal, he had shown, it appeared, a British dignity and independence. It was a long, rambling story about the Musicians' Union and a failure to pay subscriptions, a friend of the manager's who played the 'cello, something about a B Flat, smartness of appearance, Mr. Bell's enemy the oboe-player, what the musical director said, and the management making a fuss about the girls' free seats.

'A trumped-up job,' Mr. Bell thought, and he was not going to stand it. He had a week's notice, but he scorned it, and the week's wages too. He would not even go back and play on the Saturday.

'I took my instruments,' he said, 'and left the building.'

The girls applauded his nobility and firmness, but Jane urged him to go back on the Saturday and finish his engagement. Not for the money, she said, but for fear he should get a bad name for desertion.

Jane was feeling a little guilty because she had taken Ernest in on her free pass, which was intended only for herself and Lily. She had known it was wrong, but it gave her such an importance. And perhaps, she thought, it had been the last straw. She confessed her fault.

'Very likely,' said Mr. Bell airily. 'They're capable of anything. *Cassus belli*, I dare say, but they had it in for me, you see. Don't you worry, Jane. I told you it was trumped-up.'

Jane was relieved. But Mr. Bell, like other weak men, could be a mule when he wished. He would not go back.

'They'll be sorry for this,' he said. 'Besides,' he added grandly, 'I've other things to do.'

And indeed he was busy maturing his Plan.

On this Sunday afternoon they had the first swim of the year. Mr. Bell rowed them upstream in the leaky boat, decently draped in towels, and Lily trailing her feet over the stern. They talked compassionately of the plight of the picture house, bereft of Mr. Bell over the week-end; and soon it seemed that Mr. Bell was teaching the whole cinema industry a lesson. Jane had a vision of that manager crawling on to the barge and imploring Mr. Bell to bring back his 'cello. Salary, what he would.

They reached the Eyot about slack water, and Mr. Bell rested, waiting for the ebb. The river was busy with holiday traffic, loaded pleasure-steamers ploughing up to Kew, sailing-dinghies, eights and single-scullers, hired skiffs for lovers and noisy bands of youths, rich, rapid launches trailing large red ensigns and bound for Hampton Court, and fat, full motor-boats at one-and-six a journey, which the girls despised because they did not know the rules of the road, and blew their horns at sailing-boats. The Sailing Club were holding a race, but without guns because it was Sunday, and Mr. Bale's big *Violet*, the first back from the mark-boat at Barnes, came running softly home before a light breeze from the west, close under the Surrey bank.

'Silly mutt,' said Lily. 'He'd get more wind in the middle.'

'He gets the stream with him there before the tide turns,' said Jane. 'I wish we could sail in the races, father.'

'Not in this old bundle of leaks, thank you,' said Lily.

'One day, my dears,' said Mr. Bell dreamily, 'perhaps you'll have a better boat—as fine a boat as there is in these waters.' And he fixed his eyes on the fleecy skies as if it were from there that the desirable vessel might be expected to approach.

The *Violet* came abreast of them, a whispering ripple at her bows, and Jane, try how she would, began to blush; for Mr. Bale had a man with him, and he looked like Mr. Bryan. Mr. Bryan saw her, nodded, and smiled with his eyes.

'Look at Jane blushing!' said Lily wickedly. 'Who's your fancy-boy, Poppy? That why you want to go yachting?'

'Quiet, Lily,' said Mr. Bell, for whatever he might be about the morals of his daughters, he was stern upon matters of taste.

Jane said nothing, as angry with herself as with Lily. If forty Freds and forty Ernests came sailing by together, she told herself, they would not make her blush. She did not blush when she called Mr. Bryan in his bed; then why should she make a scarlet fool of herself when she saw him in public across a river? Since that birthday morning Mr. Bryan had scarcely spoken to her, and once more she determined not to think of Mr. Bryan.

Stealthily and almost imperceptibly the ebb had begun to run, and they drifted down along the island, where swans nested, herons fished, and moorhens crept in and out among the reeds. Now Jane caught her father's arm and pointed excitedly. A bright bird shot from the clay bank under the willows, sped low above the water, and disappeared, a flash of blue among the osiers.

'What's that?' said Mr. Bell.

'Kingfisher,' said Jane, her eyes shining, her blushes forgotten.

'Kingfisher—so it was,' said Mr. Bell. 'Well, I never! In London!'

'I've seen him twice,' said Jane.

Lily did not see the kingfisher at all, being occupied with a boatful of rude boys, who were waiting, as she knew, to see her remove the towel.

Jane looked about her proudly, at the sunny river, which belonged to her and had a kingfisher, at the far white sail where Mr. Bryan was. 'We won't go to Liverpool, father,' she said.

Since the job was lost there had again been vague talk of Liverpool and finding work there.

'It may not be necessary,' said Mr. Bell mysteriously, and again regarding the sky. 'If a certain proposition turns out as I expect it won't be necessary. Well, in with you, girls.'

Jane slipped off her towel, took one step to the stern, and was in the water. The watching boys saw as much of her pretty form as she had seen of the kingfisher's. But Lily was kinder, and made a great business of it, poising

and balancing and shaking her golden head in the sun, then dipping her toes in the water, embracing herself and exclaiming against the cold, and in no way seeking to conceal from the public that her figure was rounded and young. She was an inch or two taller than Jane, but not quite so slim; and Jane said that she would be fat at forty. The rude boys shouted, but Lily did not seem to know they were there. Then Jane, unrefined in revenge, cried, 'Come on, Lily, and less of the cold meat show!' The boys tittered, Mr. Bell said 'Go on, Lily, you're making an exhibition of yourself,' and Lily, disconcerted, fell flat on the water, and stung her stomach and legs. The fickle boys, who had thought her an angel, now thought she was silly, and rowed away, jeering.

The girls were strong swimmers, and swam down easily three hundred yards to the barge. They climbed up the ladder and once or twice dived in again, Lily with less of a fuss than before. Mr. Bell watched proudly from the boat, and 'Swim like fishes,' he said to himself. 'Fine girls!' Mr. Bryan, walking home from the Sailing Club, found a row of small boys peeping through holes in the fence, and took a peep himself. And the nymph with the graceful shoulders and the curving sides and slender wet limbs, he recognized with surprise as the servant who gave him his tea in the morning. For, very properly, no doubt, we do not think of domestic servants as persons with figures. Jane dived and disappeared, Mr. Bryan waited a moment, then remembered he was a gentleman and walked on.

When they had dressed and were drying their hair in the sun on deck Mr. Bell came up through the hatch with a long cutting from a newspaper and sat down importantly between them. He wore an old blue reefer coat and grey flannel trousers with a hole in the seat.

'Now, girls,' he said, 'pay attention. I have here a list of the entries for the Derby. Some of the horses will, of course, be scratched. But I want you to go carefully down the list, pick your own winners for me, and write them down separately. Don't say a word. Here's a pencil.'

Jane said, 'We don't know nothing about them, father.'

'Don't matter. Go by the names. It's what all the

fine ladies do, I believe. But do it very carefully. It's important.'

Lily said, 'Rot, Dad!' and laughed.

But Mr. Bell said, 'It's no laughing matter, Lily. I may say I rely a good deal on your judgment. And you don't know how much may depend on it—for all of us.'

His voice trembled as he said this and Jane thought he was going to cry. Even Lily was sobered. They put their wet heads together, and gravely, wonderingly, read down the long list.

Lily was first. 'I've got it!' she cried, but Mr. Bell put his finger on his lips; she wrote down her winner, and waited for Jane. Jane was as slow in choosing a winner as Lily had been in taking the plunge. She felt herself the mother of great events and hovered uncertainly between this attractive animal and that; between Mulberry and Bull's Eye, West Wind, Brian Boru, and Prudence. So many of the creatures had names which seemed of good omen to her or her family. Then far down in the list she saw a name which she had hurried past before, and knew at once that this must be her father's winner, if not perhaps her own.

With shaking fingers Mr. Bell unfolded the slips of paper.

Jane had written 'Black Prince.'

Lily had written 'The Black Prince.'

Lily crowed, but Jane was silent, watching her father's face, which was transfigured with ecstasy and awe, as if in the presence of some religious portent.

'That settles it,' he said, grasping their hands. 'Thank you, my dears. This is a miracle.'

They both felt proud of themselves for having taken part in a miracle, but Lily said, 'What's the big idea, Dad?'

Then solemnly, slowly, with many interruptions from Lily, Mr. Bell expounded the big idea.

For a long time now, it appeared, the fingers of Fate, all eight of them, had been pointing to the Black Prince. Many weeks before, when Mr. Bell was playing the 'cello, the Double Bass, in return for some small kindness, had whispered during the interval that the Black Prince was a good thing for the Derby. The strange appropriateness

of this horse to one who lived in the *Blackbird* and coveted the 'Black Swan', had attracted him at once. On inquiry he learned that the Black Prince belonged to a man named Bell, who lived in Liverpool. Two weeks later, in conversation with old Andrew the ferryman, who had a married sister who had inside information, he heard that the Black Prince was considered by the knowing to be a dark horse.

But he was not the man, as he hastily explained, to be led by mere gossip and favourable omens. He had looked up the history of the horse, and got some valuable information from, among others, the Second Violin, who knew, perhaps, more about horses than any other member of the orchestra. (The Strings had always been the racing set.) It appeared that the Black Prince had never actually won a race, and had only once been placed, after the leading horse had been disqualified. But in every case there had been some peculiar circumstances which had prevented the Prince from showing his true form, and accounted for his failure without doing him discredit. He had not had the right weights or the right weather, the right jockey or the right distance. The horse was believed to be a stayer, but his owner had foolishly, or perhaps cunningly, entered him for short races only. He was by Edward out of Cleopatra, and his sire came of good staying stock, while his dam had had a fine turn of speed in her day. The horse stood unnoticed, with many others, at a hundred to one, but Mr. Bell, for all his experience, was still inclined to put more faith in long-priced outsiders than in favourites.

Then, like a voice from Heaven, 'Steve Merry' had spoken. 'Steve' had sent him, not as his 'Nap', but as a 'Gentleman's Long-Price Gamble', the name of the Black Prince. This was the judgment of reason and experience at one with the hinting of the stars. And now, to crown all, had come the tremendous double omen of Lily and Jane. It no longer seemed possible to Mr. Bell that the Black Prince should not win the blue riband of the turf. He had the same certainty of conviction, he said, which had inspired him long ago to invest in Eurydice. It was unmistakable.

'In spite of everything, girls,' he said, 'I believe I've got a star.'

'Of course you have, Dad,' said Lily fondly, stroking his hand.

But Jane wondered secretly if perhaps her father was a little mad.

And now came the big idea. This gift of the gods, this crown of all Mr. Bell's labours on the turf, was not to be wasted. He was tired, he said, of pottering about with half-crowns. He proposed to risk all upon a single throw. 'What all?'—thought Jane, and 'We haven't got much to risk,' said Lily.

'Well, I happen to have at my disposal,' said Mr. Bell, 'the sum of a hundred pounds.'

The girls gasped, Lily crowed and exploded with questions. A hundred pounds! Wherever from? But Mr. Bell held up his hand for silence, and continued with the big idea, as if a hundred pounds could be picked up anywhere. The big idea was, simply, to stake the whole of the hundred pounds upon the Black Prince.

'All or nothing,' said Mr. Bell grandly. 'I'm tired of pottering.' It was a fortnight to the Derby, and in a week, he was sure, there would be thousands after the Black Prince. So the thing must be done at once, before the odds came down. He would do it to-morrow. The odds were still a hundred to one, and a hundred pounds invested in this manner would bring in ten thousand pounds.

Lily gave a whoop: 'No work for me then!' But Jane was silent, anxiously considering this stupendous lunacy. She knew very well that she ought to disapprove, the one sane member of the family, and yet the sheer grandeur of the plan impressed and appealed to her. It would have been bold enough before Friday, but now, with her father out of work, and no money in sight but her own little earnings, it was heroic, staggering. That Friday night, sitting on her father's bed, she had talked over plans of a very different kind with him. Lily must go to work. She was eighteen now. The kind Government would have placed her at a milliner's at the end of her trade scholarship, but Lily was lazy and had backed

out. Well, now, if it was not too late, she must go, or find something else. As for Jane, she had hoped to escape from the Ravens, come home, and look after the barge, which Lily would never do properly. But now she would have to stick it. Mr. Bell must look for work, apply for the dole, and between-times do the housekeeping. At the worst, there would be Liverpool and the well-off aunt.

And all the time, thought Jane, a little hurt, the sly old man must have had in his head this Plan, and perhaps in his pocket this mysterious sum of money. She could not imagine where that had come from, and at present she was afraid to ask.

But Lily and her father were deep in the future, and busily spending the ten thousand pounds. To begin with, they would all go to the Derby and see the horse win. Then Lily would learn dancing and run a school of dancing, which did not sound like work but would mean many young men. They would buy this boat that Mr. Bell had spoken of, but also a long white launch with a noiseless engine and a huge red ensign. The *Blackbird* would be done up and used for week-ends. Perhaps Lily could turn it into one of these night-clubs. Mr. Bell confessed that he might marry again, and perhaps buy a public-house. He looked sideways at Jane, and so did Lily. Jane, thought Lily, would marry her fancy-fellow in Mr. Bale's boat, and have several babies. But not she, Lily —no fear.

'What else shall we do?' said Lily at last, and really they could not think what to do with their money.

Jane, listening to them, found that she too was deep in her own little dream, and, pinching herself, decided that it was time that she was a mother to these children.

'Where does the hundred pounds come from, father?'

'Never you mind, my dear,' said Mr. Bell darkly. 'Call it a nest-egg.'

'Well, ought you to put it all in one basket, father? It don't seem sense. Why don't you keep some of it back, just in case——'

'No hedging!' said Lily gallantly, and her father smiled his approval.

'I wouldn't say anything if you were in work, father. But you know what it is——'

'After the Derby I shan't want work,' said Mr. Bell. 'No, Jane, Lily's right. It's all or nothing this time. All or nothing. Look at it this way,' he went on reasonably. 'Say I keep ten pounds back—that's ninety pounds. Ten pounds at the odds is a thousand. So you've lost a thousand pounds for the sake of ten. Well, what's ten pounds? That's the way I look at it. It's spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar.'

Jane could think of no answer to this. But she wondered again if her father was queer. She studied him fondly, but he did not look ill. Indeed, he sat up straight and proud, with a new kind of dignity upon him.

'Jane's got cold feet,' said Lily.

'I'm sorry if you don't like my plan,' said Mr. Bell, becoming suddenly pathetic again. 'I thought you'd like it, Jane. I'm doing it for you.

'But I do, I *do*!' cried Jane, and flung her arms about him, and kissed his stubbly chin. And from that moment she was lost. After all, it was a very wonderful plan. For a poor man, out of work, with two grown daughters, to risk his nest-egg on a single gamble, had a touch of greatness which could be respected. It was the kind of thing which was done on the pictures, and done successfully. If Charlie Chaplin backed the Black Prince it would certainly win. Comforting phrases in capital letters came back to her: her father was *Dicing With Destiny, Putting All To The Hazard, Challenging Fate;* and she felt better. Perhaps he was right, he had a star; perhaps she had a star; perhaps even Lily had a star. And it was this Black Prince which was ordained to carry them from Pawnery to Queenery. Certainly, she was sick and tired of stair-rods and the scullery, and longed to be free—free to look after her own home properly, shop when she liked and sail when she liked, go out with Ernest or up the canal with Fred. And now she began to feel herself ungrateful to her father, and looked with a sort of awe at the heroic little man who had conceived this marvel, and sat like Napoleon with his arms across his heart, gazing at the sunset with prophetic eyes.

The sun had gone behind the waterworks, the *Blackbird* was in shadow, but all the western sky wore a lovely flush, and the clouds over Richmond swam like coral in the water. Silent, the Bell family admired the most wonderful of moving pictures, and across that rosy screen they saw the Black Prince galloping to victory.

That night, because of their great wealth, they opened the tin of sardines which Jane had been keeping for a rainy day, and in thick tea they drank the health of their horse. The next day Mr. Bell had a fat letter from Liverpool. He went out in the morning, and was away all day, and in the evening announced that all was in order. All the week they grew richer and richer. There was no more talk of looking for work, and Lily and Mr. Bell became so opulent in their habits of life while Jane was working at the Ravens' that her careful housekeeping collapsed. Rather than shatter the great illusion in this anxious fortnight she went secretly to Mrs. Higgins and borrowed money. Meanwhile the future expanded daily. Lily talked now of a theatrical career, and, as for Mr. Bell, Jane thought that if it were not for Mrs. Higgins he would buy not the 'Black Swan' but the Savoy Hotel. However, he found time to varnish the dinghy, and spoke now and then of making a new window.

Jane asked Lily, and Lily thought that their father was all there. She thought it was the most sensible thing that he had ever done.

On the Thursday or Friday a terrible thought came to Jane.

'What happens, father,' she said, 'if the Black Prince is scratched?'

'He won't be,' said Napoleon confidently.

'Yes, I know. But supposing he was?'

'He wouldn't run.'

'And what would happen to the money then?'

'I should lose it,' said Mr. Bell slowly. 'I hadn't thought of that.' He touched his worried brow impatiently. 'But it will be all right, Jane. You'll see.'

VII

THE BLACK PRINCE

THE rain depressed everybody except Mr. Bell, who said that the Black Prince would be favoured by the heavy going.

Almost any Englishman can steal a day off for the Derby, if he gives his mind to it, and here they all were in the rickety taxi, Jane and Lily and Mr. Bell, Fred (unloading at Hammersmith again) and Mrs. Higgins, and even Ernest, riding to Epsom in the pouring rain.

It was a shame, the rain, for none of them had seen the Derby before, and, for parties like this, the going there is three parts of the fun. Mrs. Higgins had been so pleased by Mr. Bell's invitation that she had offered to pay for the transport. So they had hired Mr. Ewer and his taxi for the day. Mr. Ewer lived just round the corner, and it was like Mrs. Higgins to do a neighbour a good turn; but Ernest thought they would never reach Epsom, and said so. Mr. Ewer was another of these unfortunates, whom Ernest despised, in spite of his love for the oppressed worker, an inefficient, querulous little man who could do nothing right and had more grievances than he had teeth. Mr. Ewer's taxi was like Mr. Ewer, and seemed always about to fall to pieces. The roof leaked, the windows rattled, there was a constant smell of petrol, and from below came horrid grindings and thumpings, as if the bowels of the old machine were complaining. With the heavy load and the frequent stopping the engine became very hot. Steam spouted and hot water spat from the radiator. Then Mr. Ewer would stop, to the fury of the traffic, put in his head and say, 'I never knew such a thing to happen before,' and go off to borrow cold water from a cottage, while a crowd would collect to watch the geyser.

The race-goers sat uncomfortable and stiff in the stuffy cab, listening to the ceaseless patter of the rain on the roof,

and dodging the drips. Mrs. Higgins sat in one corner, Jane in the other, and Lily between them. Mr. Bell and Ernest sat bolt upright on the small seats opposite, and Fred was outside beside the driver. Mr. Bell and Jane wore tarpaulin coats, and the smell of these at least made a contrast to the petrol.

Ernest had been a wet blanket from the first. He could never enjoy a human entertainment in a human way, but must always look at it with what he called the 'proletarian eye', or 'from the workers' viewpoint'. Almost everything he saw through the cab windows reminded him of the need for the Nationalisation of the Means of Production, Distribution, and Exchange. And he distrusted the whole institution of racing for a number of reasons. It brought the 'classes' together, it made for 'irregularity of income', it was 'capitalist', it encouraged the workers 'to approve of capital and to desire it', and by giving them pleasure 'doped and deluded' them, so that they forgot about their 'wrongs' and the 'Socialist Commonwealth'. So he had joined the party as a favour, and sat with his nose very high in the air. Nevertheless, Jane's knees were between his, and he pressed them endearingly and firmly, till Lily said suddenly, 'Ernest's playing "footie".'

Ernest glared at her, and relaxed the pressure of the knee which was next to her. Jane gave Lily a reproving dig with her elbow, but Lily felt better. She was still a little sore because no friend of hers was of the party. She had been afraid that most of her young loves would not mix well with it, and her one staid admirer could not get the day off. So at the last moment Fred had been invited. Lily did not like Ernest, and from what she had seen of Fred in his oilskins, she thought he was a 'pudding'.

Jane was not too comfortable because this was the first time that Fred and Ernest had seen or heard of each other. Fred sat silent outside on the floor, thinking about Jane and hoping that the stuck-up fellow in the cab belonged to Lily.

Mrs. Higgins was hot and puzzled. From certain dark remarks of Mr. Bell she had gathered that this expedition was in some way connected with herself and his intentions.

But she could not understand how Mr. Bell could hope to get from the Derby a windfall which would be worth her while.

Only Mr. Bell was perfectly content, serene and confident, the torch of a great faith shining in his eyes. Jane thought she had never seen him look so happy. He spoke now in deliberate, kingly tones. He looked at his party benignly, pleased with the pleasure he was giving them, and not to be ruffled by the rain or Ernest or the boiling motor-cab. He wore an old bowler hat perched jauntily on one side of his head; somewhere in the *Blackbird's* litter he had found an old pair of field-glasses with one eye-piece broken, and these were slung about the tarpaulin with a double length of tarred string. From time to time he consulted one of his bundle of newspapers, chuckling over those which in their forecasts had made no mention whatever of the Black Prince (it was just as well that every one had not discovered his secret), but delighted, nevertheless, by 'Tydeus' of the *Glass*, who said that he would not be surprised if the son of Cleopatra proved a happy speculation for a place. The faithful 'Seer' had said on Sunday that if the going was heavy the Oxbridge colt might easily reverse the unfavourable impression which his defeats at Newmarket, Doncaster, Sandown, and Kempton Park had aroused. The *West London Gazette* selected him for third place. No one went so far as to suggest that the Black Prince would win. But Mr. Bell did not care. No one had expected Eurydice to win.

A long, rich limousine swept up beside the cab and halted in the crowd. A lordly chauffeur lay at the wheel, and behind him they saw a nest of gay young faces, white skins and flashing teeth, military moustaches, pearl necklaces, cigars. The sight gave pleasure to Mrs. Higgins, who loved all mankind (except the Temperance folk), and to the Bell family, who had no envy and expected in a short time to be rich themselves. The girls stared and tried to pick up an idea or two for clothes.

But Ernest, his lip curling, said, 'See them toads?'

'Toads?' said Mrs. Higgins, as if she did not understand. She was fond of Ernest, but wished he would keep his politics to himself.

'That girl's furs,' said Ernest, 'would keep me alive for a year.'

'Perhaps they're doing more good where they are,' said Lily.

'Well, I'm as good as they are, aren't I?'

'You may be as good,' said Lily, 'but I wish you was as pretty.'

Ernest scowled and his mother made an effort for peace.

'What's the matter with you, Ernest? They're happy and we're happy, and that's all that matters on Durby Day, isn't it?'

'Yes, that's the dope,' said scornful Ernest, quoting from a recent speech. 'Peace and good-will among the classes! The fleshpots for them, and the crust of bread for you and me. And all happy together!'

Ernest glowered at the car-full of parasites, all unconscious of his gaze; and Lily said:

'Why don't you get out and tell them what you think of them? I dare say they don't know.'

'I wouldn't waste my breath on them.'

'That's right,' said Lily. 'You keep it for Parliament. And if I were you, I shouldn't waste any more of it on us.'

After these words Lily put her head on Jane's shoulder and closed her eyes, with the irritating suggestion that she had triumphantly concluded the argument and was now about to sleep.

Mrs. Higgins, who was annoyed by her son's exhibition, said, 'They're human beings, aren't they, the same as yourself, Ernest? I thought you was all for brotherhood.'

Ernest made no reply, but glared at a female parasite with flaxen hair and lovely eyes, who, her lips desirably parted, was watching Mr. Ewer pouring water into his radiator out of a milk-jug.

'Seems to me, Ernest,' continued Mrs. Higgins, who knew all her son's arguments by heart, 'that this brotherhood of yours don't go very far. Any one that agrees with you is a brother, and the rest is toads. All these Croatians and foreign fish are your brothers' (Mrs. Higgins was here referring to the 'Hands off Croatia Movement', which Ernest strongly supported), 'but a nice-looking English girl is a parasite. It isn't sense. If you ask me,

any Englishman that treats me civil is my brother, and I don't care if he goes to the Durby in a Rolls-Royce or a wheelbarrow."

'It's no good, mother,' said Ernest patiently, not turning his head; 'class is class—and you can't get away from it.'

Here Lily opened her eyes, and followed Ernest's to the lovely blonde.

'If you ask me,' she said naughtily, 'Ernie's got a crush on the straw-headed fairy'; and she laughed her tinkling, mischievous laugh.

'Lily, Lily!' protested Mr. Bell mildly.

They all looked in the same direction, and Ernest flushed angrily, for, truth to tell, his gaze was political no longer, but desirous.

'I wouldn't be in that car,' he said hotly, 'for a hundred pounds.'

'Well, we'd let you go for ten bob,' said Lily.

'Lily, Lily!'

Fortunately, at this point, Mr. Ewer opened the door and said miserably, 'I never knew such a thing to happen before. But we'll be all right now.'

The block melted, the limousine slid out of sight, and the cab jolted on. Ernest's affectionate knee increased its pressure, as if to show Jane that he did not really love the blonde parasite. Jane eyed him sadly; she had not supported him in the argument, and thought he had made a fool of himself, but she was sorry for him, and so far as it was possible she expressed all this with her knee.

Jane was very silent. She alone of the Bells had not absolute faith in the Black Prince, though she had not dared to whisper it, and she was afraid.

They crawled through the outskirts of Epsom, and marvelled at the multitude of motor-cars, the limousines like battleships, the two-seaters like roller-skates, the private omnibuses, packed with aristocrats, the beer-parties in the charabancs, the pearly costers halted by the roadside, dripping but cheerful, and the children who ran beside them or climbed upon the footboard, chanting, 'Throw out your coppers! Throw out your mouldy coppers!' Mrs. Higgins drew forth a sixpence from an

ancient purse, Mr. Bell in his grand new style flung out handfuls of pennies, and bowed like Royalty from the window. A tiny, impish, irresistible face invaded Jane's window and she cried, 'Oh, Ernest, give me a penny for him!'

'Against my principles,' said Ernest grimly. 'Begging's got no right to be in a civilized State.'

'Come off it, Ernest!' said Lily rudely.

Ernest grew fierce. 'D'you think I'm going to prop up capitalism by doling out charity to the starvelings of the workers? Leave that to Baldwin, thank you!'

'Three cheers for Baldwin!' said Lily, who had begun the journey with no politics but was now a raging Tory.

'Where does your father work?' said Ernest to the boy.

'Out of work,' lied the child.

'Then tell him from me to go to the Guardians!'

'Chuck it, Lord Salisbury!' said the urchin, supposing now that he had to deal with a member of the Carlton Club, and disappeared.

'Well, thank God, I've got no principles!' said Lily. No one else spoke, and a chill fell on the party. They felt that Ernest was right, and themselves weak, sentimental beings. That was the worst of Ernest. He was so terribly right.

Half-way up the hill to the course the radiator boiled over again, and they waited till it cooled, for there were no milk-jugs in range. They had set out at nine o'clock to make sure of a position close to the course, but now it was noon, and when at last they reached the top they could find no place for the cab from which there was even a distant view of the course. Frightened by the police, harassed by touts, and now and then sticking in the mud, Mr. Ewer at last guided his shaking cab to a remote corner of the Down on the wrong side of the hill behind the Grand Stand; and Mr. Bell readily paid ten shillings to an evil-looking person who had annexed that corner for the day. Then they got out, stretched their legs, remarked that it was raining still harder, and opened the cardboard boxes of provisions and took out the basket of bottles.

'That is the Grand Stand,' said Mr. Bell with a proprietary air.

'Any one would think he had shares in it,' muttered Ernest to his mother.

It was now that for the first time Fred and Ernest exchanged words. Jane watched them, fascinated, out of the corner of her eye. Fred the peaceful, in oilskins, looked bluff and belligerent. Ernest the implacable, in his bowler hat and old black great-coat, looked feeble and mild. Each guessed that the other was after Jane. Like two dogs sniffing, they hated each other, and growled in their bellies.

'Coming down, isn't it?' said Ernest, turning up his collar.

'You're right,' said Fred.

But these soft words were like the fierce challenge of two stags preparing for battle in the glen.

They ate and drank hurriedly, impatient for the course. One of the girls asked Mr. Ewer what was his fancy. Mr. Ewer said he would have something on Deborah, and all agreed that Deborah was a horse to be avoided, for it was not conceivable that this misery's selection could be successful.

At last Mr. Bell marshalled his party and led them off to see his Epsom, which he had never seen himself. But so often had he conned over the little maps in the newspapers that indeed the picture of Epsom in his mind was as clear and detailed as the inside of the barge.

They pushed in a huddle through the crowd, dodging umbrellas and squelching in the mud. Mr. Bell led the way, looking round anxiously to be sure of the safety of his flock, one hand holding aloft an umbrella, which was always just not over the head of Mrs. Higgins, the other closed tight on his field-glasses, for, as he well knew, it was the custom to steal these valuable instruments. 'They cut 'em off you,' he explained; 'cut 'em off your back before you can turn round.'

A gipsy woman with a baby sidled up to him and whimpered fluently, 'Something for the lucky baby, kind gentleman. Hold up, Lucky Mary, and show the gentleman your face. She'll bring you luck, sir; you'll never regret it. King George gave her a sixpence, sir, the day he won the Two Thousand Guineas. You've got a lucky

face, sir; you'll have good fortune, sir—it's in your face. You'll have beautiful children, gentleman, and travel abroad. The lady's a lucky face too, sir. You'll be very happy. God bless you, sir. Say "Thank you," Lucky Mary.'

Mr. Bell beamed happily when he heard that he had a lucky face, and gave Lucky Mary sixpence. His pockets were nearly empty, but his heart overflowed with the benevolence of a millionaire.

Photographers, tipsters, fortune-tellers, and ice-cream merchants clamoured for their custom. There was no time for photographs or fortunes. But when a man in a purple bowler hat came up to Mr. Bell and said simply, 'Will you give me a shilling, sir?' without offering any services in return, Mr. Bell could not refuse him. The man took off his hat and presented Mrs. Higgins with a picture-postcard of the Duchess of York, and every one was happy.

At last they faced the great roaring amphitheatre across the course, all misty in the driving rain.

'That is Tattenham Corner,' said Mr. Bell, as if he had haunted Epsom for thirty years. 'The start is over there. There is the winning-post. The Paddock is beyond.'

They gazed in silence at the historic scene, the classic lunacy of the English race. The bookmakers snarled like animals in the rain; the caped policemen stood glistening in the rain, like rows of wet seals; the merry-go-rounds swung round merrily in the rain, and from across the dip came the blare of their wild, pathetic music; the wizards sat in the rain with their thimbles and peas, their cunning cards and tricky necklaces; the tipsters ranted in the rain; the gipsy mothers fed their babies in the rain; the rich walked mincingly about their enclosures in the rain, and the poor stood eating oranges in the rain, drinking fizzy lemonade in the rain, shying balls at cokernuts in the rain, dancing in the rain and kissing in the rain, or crushed each other in patient, sodden, chattering rows against the railings of the course. And Mr. Bell looked royally across the Downs—his Downs—for was not all this noise and bustle, this defiant revel of a multitude in the rain, directed only to one end, the triumph of the Black Prince, and the enrichment of Mr. Bell?

They walked across the course just before it was cleared for the second race, and dug their heels curiously into the fateful turf. Ernest, joining battle early, held Jane firmly by the arm, and Fred, brooding and patient, came behind with Lily. Lily talked without ceasing and Fred said nothing at all; but their dislike of Ernest was a bond between them.

They walked along the line of yelling bookmakers, the girls pointing and exclaiming as if the worthy gentlemen had been so many monsters in the Zoo. And soon Fred had his little victory. Jane, with that secret fear in her heart, had planned with Lily a little flutter of their own, so that they might perhaps have some consolation for their father, just in case the Black Prince. . . . They had ten shillings between them, saved out of the money Jane had borrowed from Mrs. Higgins. And Jane was all impatience to invest it at once. But Jane was shy of the explosive bookies, and Ernest, as usual, had views.

Suddenly she turned back to Fred.

'Fred, come and help me. Ernest's broken out with principles again.' Jane was cross now, and spoke as if they were spots. 'Ernest, trot on and tell father to wait for us.' And Ernest walked on in a sulk.

'Now, choose a nice one, Fred. Ernest says they batten on the something of the proletariat, but I can't help that.'

The happy Fred chose Bill Oates, of Wandsworth, a fatherly gentleman in a pink top-hat. He had white whiskers, a pale blue sash, a scarlet banner, and a smile which spelt goodness and loving-kindness, and in hoarse tones he constantly repeated that he was the 'Old Firm' and must not be deserted. Jane felt that it was a good action to bet with this frail and deserving old man.

'Come along, lady! Bless your pretty eyes! What's your fancy, lady? Lemonora? Thirty-three to one, Lemonora. Five shillings each way, Lemonora, thank you, lady. The Old Firm, the Old Firm, don't desert the Old Firm!'

Tremblingly, important and proud, Jane put away her betting-card, which bore the saintly likeness of Mr. William Oates. Her father, with a fond smile, was watching her, as some bishop might see his child preach his first sermon. 'Hedging, eh?' he said tolerantly. 'Well, well!'

They walked on towards the winning-post, studying the bookies' slates, and were surprised to see that the odds generally offered about Lemonora were far higher than those of the venerable Oates—forty, fifty, and even sixty. They were inclined to blame Fred until Ernest said, 'What did I tell you?' and then they defended Fred and were reconciled to William Oates.

There was a roar, for the second race was off. They pressed up behind the mass of people who stood seven deep against the rail. They were facing uphill, and could not see one inch of the course: they could see only hats and umbrellas and the backs of necks; they did not know the name of the race nor the names of any of the horses; not one of them had sixpence on the race. But there they stood painfully on tiptoe, craning their necks, patiently waiting for they knew not what. The wave of shouting rolled up to them, there was the thunder of hoofs, and between two heads Jane saw the flash of a jockey's cap and a stooping silk shoulder. The straining crowd relaxed, and Jane's first horse-race was over. But in the excitement the watchful Ernest had recaptured her arm, so he at least was satisfied.

Lily said then that she would like to see the Black Prince, and they all set out for the Paddock. It was hard work moving through the crowd; they lost their way behind the Grand Stand, and a policeman told them it cost money to enter the Paddock. It seemed a shame that they should not be able to look upon the Black Prince for nothing, when they thought what a link there was between them. But the girls were tired, Mrs. Higgins was flustered by the crowd, and Mr. Bell was afraid that if they went on they would never be back in time to see the race. They had decided to make for Tattenham Corner, and it seemed ten miles to Tattenham Corner, such thrusting and dodging, and their feet so wet. Mrs. Higgins said several times that she would fall down dead if she walked another step. Jane began to be irritated by Ernest's arm, which was rather a caress than a support. But Fred was a help to Lily, shielding her from the crowd, and she warmed towards him. Lily, of course, had come in her best coat instead of her tarpaulin, and she was wet through. Fred had decided that he was nothing to Jane. The rain

seemed to grow worse. But on trudged the dauntless pleasure-party, determined at all costs to see the Derby.

They neared Tattenham Corner, just as the police were clearing the course. There seemed no corner anywhere; the crowd was many deep along the rails. Bewildered, like sheep with the dog at their heels, they retreated aimlessly before the mounted men, who frightened Mrs. Higgins. And suddenly they found themselves miraculously in the front row of a mob of people stretched across the course at the Corner, and looking up the straight to the finish.

'No better place anywhere,' said Mr. Bell proudly, as if he had designed it all. But, 'Fortune favours the brave', said Mrs. Higgins. The rain had stopped, so Fred took off his oilskin and laid it upon the ground for Mrs. Higgins to sit upon. But a mounted policeman posted himself before her. Every one assured her that a policeman's horse could do no wrong, but Mrs. Higgins said that there was no horse born that she would trust to that extent. The crowd swayed and strained, stealthily fighting for places, and Lily and Fred were squeezed into the second row. Mr. Bell took out his race-card and they studied the colours of the Black Prince and Lemonora, and tried to commit them to memory. The Black Prince was 'black cap, cerise sleeves, white, orange hoops'. Lemonora was 'pink and white cap, green sleeves, chocolate, white hoops'.

'Black cap, white sleeves, chocolate hoops,' repeated Jane madly, while Mrs. Higgins had the card.

'What's cerise?' said Mrs. Higgins.

'It means cherry,' said Mr. Bell.

'Well, can't they speak English at Epsom?' said Mrs. Higgins.

'Ernest's colour,' said Lily. 'Pale Socialist.'

'Thank God that horse has gone!' said Mrs. Higgins. 'Stand firm, Mr. Bell, this woman's pushing. If you want to stand in front, madam, say so, and I'll call the police, but if not, perhaps you'll take your elbow out of my appendix.'

Lily, suddenly sobered, whispered secretly to Jane, 'Jane, I've got cold feet too.'

Jane shivered; she was in a fever, terrified, miserable, thrilled. 'Black cap, cerise sleeves, white, orange hoops. . . . Pink and white cap, green sleeves, chocolate' . . . No, that was Lemonora. It was funny that she was thinking more of Lemonora now than of the Black Prince. Was that because of her own bet, or because she did not really believe in the Black Prince—never had? 'Black cap, cerise sleeves, white, orange hoops' . . . But the Black Prince *must* win. . . . If he did not win, what was to happen? How was she to pay Mrs. Higgins? To say nothing of the hundred pounds. . . . And all their dreams. . . . The 'Black Swan', the sailing-boat, Lily's dancing lessons, Mrs. Higgins, the motor-launch. . . . Black cap, cerise sleeves. . . . And her father? Would he go really mad? Jane glanced at him. He was still in his imperial mood on the surface, and he said to Mrs. Higgins, 'You will see the field come round that corner. But before that we may get a glimpse of them on the hill.' But Jane saw that his lips twitched, he closed his eyes, and, though Jane did not know it, he whispered to himself, as he had whispered last night beside his bed, 'Oh, God, make the Black Prince win! Oh, God, make the Black Prince win, and I will be a better man.' Black cap, cerise sleeves. . . .

'There they come,' said Mr. Bell. 'The parade.' The first of the horses were prancing and showing off far away before the Grand Stand. Mr. Bell lifted his crazy glasses to the limit of the tarred string and gazed expertly into the distance. 'Ah, yes, the favourite. . . . What number is the Black Prince, Jane? . . . Seventeen? . . . Yes. What colours again? . . . Black cap, cerise sleeves, white, orange hoops. . . . Of course. . . . Yes. . . . Black cap. . . . I see a dark horse, but the hoops? . . . What colour hoops, Jane? Orange? Yes. . . . Those are pale blue. . . . Ah, now. . . . Black cap, cerise sleeves. . . . Yes, there is the colt. . . . I see him now. . . . Looks in fine fettle too. Well, there they go. . . .'

The last horse cantered away to the start, and Jane looked fondly at her father again, certain in her own mind that he had seen no more of the Black Prince than she had. And she too prayed, 'Oh, God, make the Black Prince win. . . . Oh, God, make father happy. . . .'

Then came a terrible time. A hush fell upon the waiting people. The rain fell again, and Jane could hear nothing but the patter of the rain and the beating of her heart. There was a sudden swirl and heave in the crowd behind, but Ernest's arm was round her and held her in her place. She was surprised and pleased, and suddenly she craved his sympathy. 'Ernest,' she whispered, looking up into his eyes, 'wish for the Black Prince, will you?' And she looked so sweet and appealing under her funny little sou'wester hat, with her eyes shining and her face wet with the rain, that Ernest for once forgot his principles; he became human, he was caught in the lunatic drama of this race, and he said, 'I do, Jane, I do.' Jane pressed his hand gratefully and he was rewarded.

Would they never start? Black cap, cerise sleeves, white, orange hoops. . . . Pink and white cap, green sleeves, chocolate hoops. . . . Lily began to learn the colours of the favourite, Cherry Ripe, as well: 'Pink cap, orange sleeves, purple . . .' And this muddled every one.

Mr. Bell, with his glasses raised, was pretending that he could see what was happening at the start, but nobody believed that he could see anything. 'Two of them seem fresh,' he murmured. 'The favourite, I think, is giving trouble.'

'Where's the Black Prince, father?

'I cannot distinguish.'

'Well, would you believe it,' sighed Mrs. Higgins; 'he's brought that horse back again to the very identical spot! Officer, either that horse goes, or I go. *That's* my little gentleman! Don't lose your place, Mr. Bell.'

Jane looked up in her father's face, and whispered, 'It will be all right, father, I know it will.'

But in Mr. Bell's mind there was nothing but the image of a black horse which he had never seen, and the roar of the multitude, 'The Black Prince wins!'

'They're off!' Jane trembled and clutched her father's arm, she felt her flesh wither as if she had suddenly turned yellow. Black cap, cerise sleeves. . . . Along the top of the hill they saw through gaps a string of flying dots.

'There they go,' said Mr. Bell. 'I can't see . . .

The crowd surged forward, and suddenly the most important thing seemed to be to keep her father in his place. He *must* see the Black Prince win! . . . He was holding up his glasses, feebly turning the screw, and looking this way and that. 'What colour sleeves, did you say, Jane?' 'Don't push, don't *push*!' she cried in an agony, and braced her back and dug her heels into the ground. But it was no good; the burly fellow had squeezed in front of them. . . . 'Beg pardon, miss; they're pushing behind.' . . . Another heave and they were back in the third row, all four of them. Jane could have cried for her father's sake. The field came in sight up the hill, the crowd yelled and struggled, she could remember nothing of the colours except 'black cap, cerise sleeves . . . pink and white cap. . . .' The horses thundered down to the Corner; she had to stand tiptoe to see them, and then she could see only a flying muddle of colour. They went too fast, she could fix her eyes on nothing. Yes, there was a dark horse among the first few. The Black Prince! No, the cap was not black. The cap was pink and white. . . . Lemonora! They were crying, 'The favourite wins! Deborah wins! Hermit! Merrylegs!' The Black Prince was on no one's lips. Yes, there was one. . . Ernest—*Ernest!*—was crying like a madman, 'The Black Prince! The Black Prince!' But what had happened? Where was the hope of the Bell family? The first horses were away round the corner. And then among the last few stragglers she saw a black horse go by; she saw unmistakably the black cap, cerise sleeves, the white jacket, the orange hoops. It was the Black Prince—last but three. Jane felt suddenly weak. She glanced at her father, but he had not seen. He was gazing through his one-eyed glasses up the straight, still blissfully trying to follow the black horse which he too had perceived among the leaders—the dark horse Lemonora.

'It's all right,' he said, lowering the glasses; 'he has the race well in hand. Going very strong.'

Jane choked a sob in her throat. The race was over, the crowd surged forward over the course; already the news had flashed uncannily back to them. 'Deborah,' said everybody. 'Deborah! Mr. Ewer's fancy!' Deborah,

Brighteyes, and Lemonora. Lemonora—the consolation! Jane could not face her father; she slipped away from him and found Fred.

'Fred, I believe we've won something on Lemonora. Look after father, Lily; we'll meet you at the taxi.' And she scampered up the course with Fred.

As they ran, dodging in and out among the people, they worked out breathlessly their winnings on Lemonora. Thirty-three to one, a stake of five shillings, and a quarter of the odds for a place. That was eight. Eight times five was forty, forty shillings—two pounds. Forty shillings, after all their hopes; forty shillings was their miserable harvest. Yet even this was something; it would help to pay Mrs. Higgins, and Jane felt somehow that she must run to make sure of it, her humble consolation. It would please her father, perhaps, that she had won something on her first bet. But why had they not put fifty pounds on Lemonora? That would have been—what? Eight times fifty: eight noughts are nought—four hundred pounds. Four hundred pounds! Not ten thousand, perhaps, but what wealth! Compared with forty shillings. Jane again wanted to cry when she thought of it. She blamed, not her father, but herself. Now it seemed that it must have been obvious from the first that Lemonora would be third and the Black Prince low down among the 'also rans'. Always in her heart she had known that the Black Prince was a fraud. She had never believed in him; her father was mad, but the fault was her own. She should have been wise, she should have been strong.

'Just about here was his berth,' said Fred, looking round.

They halted. On every side were bookmakers cheerfully disgorging money, but they could not see Mr. William Oates.

'There!' cried Jane, 'he's next to that man!' And she pointed ahead to Mr. Gus Morris of Finsbury, whose pale-blue bowler she remembered. But beyond Mr. Morris was a gap in the line. They stood and stared at this gap. In it were two old boxes and a broken umbrella, and a few torn betting tickets, but no William Oates. No red banner, no pink top-hat, but a few poor people staring sadly like themselves. Mr. William Oates had departed.

'Slipped his moorings,' said Fred uncomfortably.

'Do you mean he's a welsher?' cried Jane, still refusing to believe.

'Looks like it, Jenny.'

'Oh, Fred, it's too much!' And now at last poor Jane laid her head upon Fred's oilskin chest and cried and cried before the noisy crowd, mourning her forty shillings.

Fred was puzzled, for he did not know the full tale of the Bells' misfortunes, and embarrassed because people looked at him, and remorseful because he had selected William Oates. But still he liked to have Jane crying on his chest; and he thought, 'What about it, Ernest, my lad?'

It was soon over. 'We won't tell them, Fred,' said Jane bravely, drying her eyes. 'Pretend we got the money, won't you? I knew this would happen, Fred. That's why I ran.'

With this poor consolation they tramped back to the taxi. Everywhere were bookmakers paying out money, and it seemed hard that out of so many their William only should have turned deceiver; everywhere were laughing people, heartlessly gay, and Jane felt that they should all be told of the Bell family's misfortunes. They passed four men chanting a hymn and holding aloft a red and white banner—

'THE WICKED SHALL BE TURNED INTO HELL.'

'That's something, anyway,' said Fred, thinking of Mr. Oates. And Jane was a little comforted.

A wretched little company waited at the taxi, finishing the beer. Mr. Bell sat in a corner, his eyes closed, not saying a word. He would not even look out to see the King's car go away. Mrs. Higgins had had a pound on Cherry Ripe and lost it. The forty shillings cheered everybody (except Ernest). The journey had not been for nothing. Mr. Bell opened his eyes, said, 'Well done, Jane,' and closed them again. The unlucky Mr. Ewer had backed Deborah and won ten shillings. And with this poor freight the little cab crawled homewards.

They were all exhausted and only Ernest seemed to remain master of his fate. It was raining hard, and Jane

insisted that Fred should come inside. But Ernest did not suggest that he should go outside. It was awkward for the three men dividing the two small seats between them ; so Ernest suggested that he should sit on the back seat with Jane on his knee. And, since no one had the spirit to oppose it, this was arranged. Mrs. Higgins and Lily fell asleep at once ; Mr. Bell did not sleep, but his sad head rolled like a dead man's from side to side when the cab jolted. Fred ate a banana and gazed broodingly at Jane across the cab. Jane did not like to sleep on Ernest's lap under the eye of Fred, but sat perched on those bony knees, wearily awake. No one spoke.

It must be said to the credit of Ernest that he respected the mood of the party and did not once point out the need for the 'Nationalisation of the Means of Production, Distribution, and Exchange'. Nor did he draw any moral from the misfortunes of the day, but sat nursing his principles in silence. He was sorry that Jane had won money by a bet, and he faintly regretted that human moment in which he had forgotten principle and shouted wildly for the horse Black Prince. He turned over in his mind many sound reflections upon the economic evils of gambling, and its influence upon the poor. And he felt, very rightly, superior to these poor mortals in the cab.

But meanwhile, Fred's head nodded at last, and in the dark corner Ernest's superior fancy turned lightly from economics to thoughts of love, and Ernest's hand crept round Jane's weary form, and fondly clasped her stomach. And so by slow degrees he drew her to rest upon his superior breast, and Jane, too tired to object to anything, fell asleep upon the superior shoulder.

So they travelled for many miles, and only the vigilant Ernest was conscious of his surroundings. Then the cab stopped suddenly, Mrs. Higgins woke up and looked at her watch, Fred woke up and saw Jane in the arms of Ernest, asleep, Mrs. Higgins looked out and saw a public-house, Lily woke up and said she was cold, Mrs. Higgins said why should they not stop and have something to keep out the cold, Mr. Bell said, 'We've no money,' and closed his eyes again, but Lily said, 'What about our forty shillings?' She woke up Jane and said, 'Where's our

forty shillings ? ' and Jane had to confess the whole truth about William Oates. Mr. Bell said, ' My God ! ' without opening his eyes, and every one felt this was the last straw, except Ernest, who was glad. The cab rattled on, a little world of gloom. No one slept any more. But the shameless, superior, triumphant Ernest enjoyed himself still.

At Kew Bridge fell the final blow. There was a grinding, rending, clattering sound beneath them, and the greater part of Mr. Ewer's engine fell in little bits upon the road. Mr. Ewer got down slowly, went back and stared curiously at the odd pieces of metal strewn upon the highway, returned to the cab, opened the door, and said, ' I never knew such a thing to happen before.' Mrs. Higgins had sevenpence, so they came back from the Derby in a tram.

VIII

MR. BRYAN

IT turned out next day that only an uncanny combination of misfortunes had prevented the Black Prince from winning the Derby. At the start he had been 'interfered with', at the first corner he had been badly 'cut into', and shortly after there was some sad bumping and boring. A general conspiracy of the other horses and jockeys engaged had blasted the Bells' hopes. This news seemed somehow consoling to Mr. Bell, for it showed that fundamentally his judgment had been sound. It was better to be blasted by misfortune than by folly.

'I knew,' he said at the family *post mortem* in the evening. 'I knew the colt had the legs of the field, if he only had the luck. But the best judgment in the world can't cope with accidents. Never mind, girls,' he said bravely, 'the luck will change one day.'

'No, it won't, father; this has got to stop.' Words tumbled in confusion from Jane's trembling lips, for it was time to be a tyrant, and last night she had lain awake rehearsing the part. If she weakened now, the next minute, she knew, they would all be picking winners for the Gold Cup. 'Your horse wouldn't win, father, if all the other horses lay down. You'll never back a winner if you live to be a hundred.'

'Eurydice . . .' murmured Mr. Bell, gazing in surprise at Jane's excited face, pale with the effort to be tyrannical and firm.

'Every man has one stroke of luck in his life,' said Jane, 'and that was yours. But you won't have another; and, what's more, you're not going to try. I'm putting my foot down.'

Jane, as she said this, made a delicate stamp, like a young hind pawing the ground, and since she had a teapot in one hand and a pile of dirty plates in the other, it was

funny, and Lily laughed. Jane put the pot and plates on the floor, sat down beside Lily, and pinched her thigh fiercely to secure her support.

'It's no good, father. Lily and me have made up our minds. Either you promise to give up the betting or we walk off and leave you—don't we, Lily?'

This being the first that Lily had heard of this resolution, she opened her pretty lips to say, 'I dunno'; but, receiving a second and more violent pinch, said, 'That's right, Dad,' instead.

'The luck will turn, Jane,' said Mr. Bell feebly.

'So will the worm,' said Jane, astonished at herself. 'I'm the only one of us that's bringing in a halfpenny, and I'm not going on slaving in that house if it's all going on horses. So you see.'

Jane pinched herself now, to be sure that it was really herself who was saying all these extraordinary things. Never in her life had she thought of herself as 'slaving'; it was an expression of Florry's, and of course Ernest's. And here she was throwing it at her poor father, of all people!

Still, she must keep it up. 'Is it a promise, father?'

'Very well, Jane,' said Mr. Bell meekly. 'I've told you all along that I only did it for you.'

And he looked so miserable that Jane longed to reprieve him, to give him a good tip, and send him off to Epsom. But instead she said, 'I owe Mrs. Higgins five pounds. How much do you, father?'

'A hundred,' said Mr. Bell with an attempt at ease.

'*A hundred pounds!* To Mrs. Higgins?'

'No, Jane—to your aunt.'

Jane gasped. 'Was that the hundred you said you had by you?'

'Yes, Jane,' said Mr. Bell, and hung his head.

'My God!' said Lily.

Jane could make no comment on this piece of news. She said, 'Well, that settles it. You'll have to go to work, Lily.'

'I won't go into service, not for any one.'

'Well, you can go to that Education place to-morrow and see if they'll have you still for the millinery. You'll

take her, father. And you'll make your bed before you go, Lily—see? We're going to have an alteration here. And now you can wash up, because I'm going across to see Mrs. Higgins.'

Lily, sobered by the situation, and taken aback by this new Jane, piled the plates in silence.

Jane kissed her father, and he said, 'You're a hard girl, Jane, but you're right, I suppose.'

'It will be all right, father,' the hard girl said, and going up on to the wharf cried quietly against the fence. But it entered her mind that she was a case of '*Out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings*', which was a striking caption out of The Baby Queen, and she went on comforted to borrow some more money. For what she earned from the Ravens was eighteen shillings a week.

The next morning, when she took up the tea, Mr. Bryan said, 'Well, Jane, you'll be rid of me soon.'

'Rid of you, Mr. Bryan?' said Jane blankly, tray in hand.

'I'm leaving here.'

'Leaving us, Mr. Bryan?' Jane thought 'Oh, Lord, another smack in the face!' and she was afraid that her voice sounded the same note. It did.

'But I'm not going very far. I've taken a studio. Not far from you, I believe.'

'Not that one on the wharf, Mr. Bryan?' said Jane, trying to keep perfectly calm.

'That's the one. And when I'm settled in, you're going to come and sit for me, aren't you?'

'Sit for you, Mr. Bryan?'

'I mean, I want to do a picture of you.'

'Very well, Mr. Bryan.'

'When can you come?'

'Friday's my day out, Mr. Bryan. I could come in the afternoon.'

'Next Friday?'

'Yes, Mr. Bryan.'

'Half-past two?'

'Yes, Mr. Bryan.'

'All right, then. Half-past two.'

'Thank you, Mr. Bryan. I've turned on the bath.'

Jane went out with her tray, thinking, '*Lured to the*

Haunts of Bohemia. Estelle Falls in with Bad Company.' She was excited, she was thrilled. And all she had said was, ' I've turned on the bath.'

The Honourable George Gordon Bryan was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and had as soon as possible ejected it. He was a rebel, or so he thought, against his own class. He could not prevent his parents from sending him to Eton, but after four years he nearly succeeded in being removed for a tiresome habit of travelling up to London and visiting the music-halls, while his unseemly caricatures of the tutorial staff had never endeared him to the authorities. Among the boys he was considered strange because of his attitude to games. In his last year he would without doubt have played for the XI if he had consented to devote himself to cricket, but he preferred to go fishing, or to wander about the country-side observing the behaviour of small birds. This shameful act of renunciation had no precedent in the history of the school, but for his caricatures and his cricket he was, nevertheless, elected to ' Pop '. The young bloods of athletics, however, were never his favourite companions, and his best friend was a bookish, spectacled boy called Raven, who was generally bowled by a half-volley, fielded short leg, and wrote better Latin prose than Cicero himself. Bryan had no liking for Latin prose, though he had a passion for the poet Homer ; but Raven knew all about birds, they both hated running and liked long walks, and these, so far as any one could see, were the only foundations of the friendship.

Gordon's father, the seventh baron, had intended him for Cambridge and the House of Commons, but Gordon, again shaking off the laurels, insisted on going to Australia instead. His brother, the heir, was a Member of Parliament, and his father punctually attended the House of Lords whenever the Liquor Laws, the Divorce Laws, or horse-racing were the subject of debate ; and Gordon said that three members of the same family in public life was more than any country deserved. He did not regard himself as a heaven-born painter, so at least his father had no tiresome arguments about Art to put up with. He

shrugged his shoulders and slightly reduced the boy's allowance. So Gordon travelled to Australia in a small cargo-steamer instead of by the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. On the way out he assisted from time to time in the stokehold, but did not pretend, as the common cant is, that this is a noble or an interesting occupation, and soon gave it up. He then spent the days drawing the most extraordinary unlikenesses of the crew, which were his first attempts at serious work. In his last term at Eton he had come under the influence of the Neo-Post-Impressionists, whose Exhibition he shamefully attended when he should have been watching the Eton and Harrow match.

This school, of course (not Harrow, but the Neo-Post gentlemen) has set its face against all naturalistic forms of expression in art, and particularly against the sterile reproduction of the human form as we know it. Their pictures, for the most part, are essays in abstract design and are seldom concerned with anything more solid than a parallelogram or an equilateral triangle, though, try how they may, such concrete objects as stove-pipes, bowler hats, wood-blocks, factory-chimneys, and odd parts of women's faces will wander into their compositions. The more conservative members still audaciously persist in representing the human form, but preserve their consciences and their membership by expressing it in terms of parallelograms, equilateral triangles, wood-blocks, stove-pipes, and bowler hats. It was in this kind of way that Gordon Bryan painted the simple sailors of the *Sea Horse*, giving full value to the ventilators, the derricks, life-belts, funnels, and any other geometrical shapes which happened to attract him. Here, for the first time, he suffered the social disadvantages of modernism in art; for the honest seamen argued, with some reason, that these strange portraits must be either imbecile or insulting. Liking the man personally, they charitably plumped for imbecility, a view which was supported by his voluntary labours in the stokehold. He left the ship at Sydney, firm friends with every one.

He liked the Australians at once for their friendliness and gaiety and happy innocence of aristocracy. In the

great bar of the Australia Hotel a merry young man invited him to a sheep-station five hundred miles away, and repeated the invitation, sober, in the morning. On the sheep-station, far out on the borders of the back-blocks, for no particular reason Bryan spent two years, first as a 'Jackeroo' or apprentice, and then as a recognized human being. Here he drafted sheep, and talked sheep, and even sheared sheep, and fell mildly in love with a lady who lived one hundred and fifty miles away and rode over for a week-end once a year. The next two years he passed on a cattle-station farther north, where he dipped cattle, mustered cattle, rounded-up cattle, drafted cattle, talked cattle, and fell mildly in love with a lady who lived three hundred miles away and motored over for tennis once every six months. Once he went down to Sydney for a week and fell mildly in love with a lady who was leaving for Ceylon the next day. He liked the life, the sun, the gum trees, the picnics, and the people, grew brown and lusty and acquainted with horses, and such painting as he did had a disgraceful taint of the naturalistic. But after four years he grew tired of ignoring the invitations of his family to go home, and went.

At Colombo, unfortunately, he met Miss Sybil Colebatch, the eldest daughter of the Governor of Ceylon. Still more unfortunate, she travelled home with Lady Colebatch, in the S.S. *Pindi*.

After three years at Government House, Miss Sybil was poised uncomfortably between two worlds. She was accustomed to say, 'Do this,' and somebody did it; she had clapped her hands and grave men like Rajahs appeared bowing from four corners, and in all this she delighted. But in the things of the mind she felt herself starved; she detested the barren, the non-existent culture of the colony. At home she had always read the latest book as soon as it was heard of, but now it was out of date long before she heard of it. In Chelsea she had hovered on the fringes of the highbrows; in Ceylon, she felt, there were no brows at all. She never saw a new play or a new picture; she pined for the Leicester Galleries, the Russian Ballet, and the audacious performances of the Sunday night societies. But she missed Government House the moment

she set foot in the *Pindi*. She wanted the gorgeous East and the West End all in one.

George Gordon Bryan was the nearest approach to that combination in the *Pindi*. She liked the looks of him; she saw him sketching a radiator and judged that he was Modern. Gordon had not seen any one like Sybil since he was a schoolboy, and, because of her blue eyes, her pearly skin, and her fair, proud head, was willing for a while to be the conquered East. It was a change to meet a woman who talked neither of sheep nor cattle nor horses, and yet was acquainted with the simple life of the British Empire. So he shifted her deck-chair from the shade into the sun, and from the sun into the shade, stopped reading when she wished to walk and stopped walking when she wished to read, collected the books, bags, and brooches which she left about the ship, persuaded her to take a Benedictine after dinner, permitted her to dress him for the fancy-dress dance, taught her to play shuffle-board, partnered her in the treasure-hunt, gazed deep into her peerless eyes and listened attentively to her opinions about art, life, literature, the passengers, and Ceylon. But these opinions she kept simple and broad, though refined, and suitable to a gentleman who, however aristocratic, had spent four years in Australia.

Long before Port Said the passengers said things; and they were true. For to Sybil Colebatch George Gordon fell a victim at last. In the Red Sea they became secretly engaged, on the boat-deck. And had Sybil steered the same wise course as before they might even have been married. But Sybil, as is usual in the flush of success, forgot her wisdom. As they travelled northwards from hot to cold, from white drill to woollen jerseys, she threw off the barbarous languor of the tropics, and became more and more artistic, intellectual, and refined. As the temperature descended Sybil's brow seemed to rise. She flung Italian painters about like so many quoits; she dug out of her trunks the writings of a man called Proust, who could devote a whole book, it seemed, to the flicker of an eyelid. Her conversation became very subtle and oblique, and, on the noisy ship, very difficult to follow, like Mr. Henry James read aloud on the Underground Railway.

The sight of her fellow-passengers, none of whom, she felt, had even heard of the man Proust, grew painful to her. She spoke of them, not by their names, which she never remembered, but by the names of various painters of whom they reminded her. This young woman was 'The Gauguin', and that 'The Van Gogh', while the men were ranged from 'The Hogarth' to 'The Picasso'. She had a habit of making confidential remarks on their appearance and dress in flute-like but penetrating tones, after which she would laugh adorably (but loudly) and flash at Gordon her captivating eyes. Gordon found this embarrassing, having by nature the opposite habit of friendly toleration, which Australia had fortified. Also he discovered that he was not enough interested in art and literature to discuss them with satisfaction all day. And more and more he retired from his beloved into the smoking-room and talked to the Australians about sheep.

Sybil passed easily from talking to lecturing. On the second day out from Port Said she asked to see all his drawings. She turned them over almost in silence, murmuring from time to time, 'Interesting,' 'How virile!' and 'Fascinating pattern'. But that evening she announced that what he was cut out for was public life. She was honest about it. 'You have talent,' she said, 'but I don't think you're a good enough painter to give your life to it.' Which was a brave thing to say, and, for all he knew, true. So for the rest of the voyage, while he arranged her cushions, she arranged his career. By Malta he was in the House of Commons, off Stromboli he rose to an Under-Secretaryship, and before Marseilles he was Chief Whip. Gordon hated plans and had travelled fifteen thousand miles to avoid Parliament. Moreover, these excursions into public life discovered multitudes of mutual friends; and Gordon was reminded of the Decies, the Anstruthers, the Foljambes, and many other families who painfully recalled tea-time every second Thursday at No. 7 Belgrave Square.

Sybil was a puzzle. She shared, at first sight, so many of his leanings, but she seemed to have a genius for exaggeration, and spoiled everything by overdoing it. He had revolted against regimented cricket, but liked honest

exercise. Sybil thought it an outrage that any British boy should be asked to move a muscle when he might be reading the Restoration Drama, and she could not herself be persuaded into anything more active than the game called shuffle-board, in which the player stands almost immobile and with a long pole propels a flat wooden disc a few yards along the deck. George Gordon liked sausages, but did not dare to mention this; for he felt that either Sybil would cut sausages out of his life or they would have sausages at every meal. He landed at Marseilles still loyal and engaged, but lacking the fine free rapture of the Red Sea. Sybil, by the way, thought kissing rather vulgar.

The family welcomed the couple with delight, and a communication was made at once to the Central Office of the Conservative Party. Meanwhile, Sybil began his education proper. She took him to matinées on sunny days, she took him to the Film Society on Sunday afternoons; she took him on Sunday nights to peculiar plays by Czechoslovakians; she took him to the 'Ring', to the Wallace Collection, the Tate Gallery, the Poets' Corner, to the Russian Ballet, the Negro Dancers, and the Hampstead Theatre, and to show him she was no highbrow she took him to the Coronet Club, the Eton and Harrow match, and to Ascot on Gold Cup day.

And, strangely enough, the Coronet Club, Lord's, and Ascot were perhaps the three last intolerable straws; for these showed him finally that he could not endure the society of Society, whether they talked about Proust or about polo. The general scene of Ascot delighted him: the moving masses of colour, the thin green river of the course, the sun and the shouting, the rolling downs and dim blue hills, and the stately advent of the Royal party. There was no 'Socialist nonsense' in his head; he approved in theory of this parade of nobility and leisure, provided that he was not part of the show; and he regarded himself as a 'good Conservative'. No, this strange youth found Society *socially* wanting—a dull class, unreal and unattractive. And of all the works of man he abominated most the top-hat, the tail-coat, and the lavender spat. Other men might wear them if they would, but on his own person they made him feel foolish and unhappy.

(No attempt is being made here to defend these preposterous opinions; they are merely recorded for what, if anything, they are worth.)

He disliked his hat, he disliked his trousers; he disliked the label which hung upon his breast—'Royal Enclosure. The Hon. Gordon Bryan'; and, irritated by these things, he began to dislike the people. Strolling in the Paddock with Sybil, who was like a lily just opened, and as free from care, he sourly studied the faces. Many of the men were fine-looking, bronzed, handsome, healthy, though cast all in the same monotonous mould. Many of the younger ones were vacuous and feeble, and moustaches grew over a suspicious number of the mouths. All, like the racehorses circling in the middle, had labels on them, which revealed their pedigree and importance. But no one, after all, goes to Ascot to look at the men. The women too wore labels, and needed them grievously, Mr. Bryan thought. The women were the great surprise and disappointment. Many times his eye was caught by a dazzling frock, a dainty hat, or a provoking glimpse, a promise of beauty; and then the lady would turn to show a face empty, expressionless, fatigued, and plain.

'My God, how ugly they are!' he exploded at last.

'Who, dear?' said Sybil.

'These women. I've not set eyes on a single winner. Except you.'

'Don't be so Australian, dear,' said Sybil, by no means flattered, but rather resenting the aspersion on her caste. 'I've seen some very charming girls.'

'Well, I've seen one or two. But what is two among the whole of *Who's Who*? Think of the time they have, the money they spend, the trouble they take! They ought *all* to be beautiful! It's all they've got to do. And if they can't be beautiful there's nothing to be said for them.'

'Are you going Bolshie, dear?'

'No, dear. But all I can say is this,' said Mr. Bryan, worked up, 'if you took the first fifty typists you met in the City, and the first fifty girls out of any big store, and fifty chorus-girls and fifty manicure-girls and fifty parlour-maids, and washed them and scented them and dressed them up in these clothes, and hung labels on them, and set

them to walk up and down in the Paddock, you would see a show that's worthy of this country. . . . My God, there'd be so much beauty that no one would look at the races!'

'Oh, well, if you prefer typists——' said Sybil. 'We'd better go back, or we shall miss the next race.'

During the three-thirty they both reflected on this ridiculous conversation, and Gordon reflected that it was a strange reason for the first real coolness between a plighted couple, the gentleman's complaint that he could see no other attractive women.

That night, at the Coronet Club, he had another prolonged view of Society, and thought them a poor lot. Few of them were young, and none, he thought, attractive. There was not one arresting or creative face, nor one that spoke of a simple soul: only a dull uniform of birth and breeding, wealth and white ties, fine linen and fatigue. No man in that room would have dared to enter it in a dinner-jacket. No man had an opinion of his own. And even the few stray authors and actors there had loyally left their souls in Bond Street, and were submerged and indistinguishable among the noble herd.

And Mr. Bryan, with prophetic eye, saw himself sucked into that herd. Month after month, and Season after Season, and year after year, he would go to the same parties and see the same people, wear the same clothes, and eat the same food as the rest of the herd; go to the same fashionable plays, and say the same fashionable things about them; learn the latest step when he was told to, and give it up when it became taboo; go to the same Academy, same Ascot and Lord's, same Goodwood and Cowes; shoot the same birds on the same day; and flee to Monte Carlo by the same express. Never again would he do anything unusual, or anything that was not in the book of rules, or a fashionable 'stunt'. Nothing real or simple would happen again, or if it did it would be kept very dark. He would be as much master of his fate as a member of a trade union in a general strike. He would constantly wear a top-hat.

And, ten to one, this girl of his would have him into Parliament; and that would be a second set of rules and regulations, pretences and restraints, piled one on top

of the other. Committee-meetings, lunches, constituents, questions, at homes, dinners, debates, receptions, divisions—he knew what a life his brother led. And constantly the white tie, constantly the stiff, starched, abominable shirt.

Poor Sybil unfortunately chose this moment to discuss his political career. The band was playing 'O Baby!' and the nobility were performing the newest dance, which was based upon the actions of American negro women when waddling through a swamp with babies on their heads. To this foundation the dancing-schools had added a step resembling the movements of a crab which has had one claw crushed and is uncertain of its destination, a sort of sideways dithering, with much wriggling of the hips. The dancers throughout gazed fixedly at their feet, and looked desperately unhappy. Sybil pointed out young Lord Waters who had done so well in the House. He excited in Gordon neither envy nor ambition. He had a fluffy soft moustache and an air of over-breeding, like a King Charles spaniel or a blue carnation. 'A horrible fellow,' thought Gordon. But, to do him justice, he looked bored. Sybil pointed out that Gordon would be able to practise his art in his spare time. Mr. Winston Churchill, for example, found time for painting and writing as well. And if a man had a definite business in life he enjoyed 'that sort of thing' so much more when he could get away to it. Gordon perceived that Sybil thought less and less of his art. It was a harmless hobby; he would be allowed to paint in the holidays, as a child is allowed to have the paint-box out on Sunday. She might be right; he only knew that he liked doing it, and wanted to do it more and more.

Lord Waters was dancing with a very fat woman and looked very ridiculous. Sybil said she was Lady Marvell, who had so much influence with the Party. A few more weeks, thought Gordon, and I shall be hung like a pendant on that ample bosom. He took Sybil out to dance. The floor was crowded now, for a common fox-trot was the tune, and they stood wedged among the couples, scarce moving geographically, but jigging busily with the feet and shoulders. Everybody talked, and at the end of a sentence moved on an inch or two, bumped gently into the next couple, and the gentleman said, 'I beg your pardon.'

The gentleman bumped turned his head with a smile of ineffable forgiveness, which was almost a thanksgiving. So they moved on, like animated statues planted on a glacier. 'Typical,' thought Gordon. 'Society can only dance in a place so fashionable that no one can dance in it. Why try?' Sybil talked all the time in his ear about a Czechoslovakian play which proved that Man was lower than the animals. She thought it was stimulating. Gordon bumped Lord Waters and was bumped by Lord Marvell, and apologized, and grinned, and grinned again. He felt somehow guilty because he was not enjoying himself, for, after all, they were his own breed, these people. 'It's hot,' sighed Sybil. 'It's a hot-house,' said Gordon, and suddenly felt better, for he had remembered the great tent full of orchids at that dreadful flower show to which Sybil had taken him, top-hat and all. And these were orchids, he saw now, these noble, expressionless faces about him, forced artificial blooms without fragrance or simplicity.

In the tent, he had thought, they were reaching out for him, those peers of the floral kingdom, those waxen monsters with their spotted tongues and aristocratic, unnatural shapes. Lord Waters was an orchid; even Lady Marvell, in an elephantine fashion, was an orchid, an *odontoglossum*. And they were trying to catch him and keep him in the hot-house, keep him and cultivate him until he grew complicated and proud and unreal as themselves, till it was natural to be unnatural. 'I won't be an orchid,' he said, suddenly determined. 'All the same,' Sybil was saying, 'there is a sort of *rhythm* in the Expressionist plays.' 'Let's sit down,' said Gordon, feeling himself dangerous with unexploded irritation. But about what? Was it Lord Waters or the crowd, the dance, the heat, the governing classes or public life; was it something to do with his painting, with top-hats, with highbrows, Czechoslovakia, tail-coats, or the absence of beauty at Ascot? Perhaps it was all of these things; perhaps, to be honest, he reflected gloomily, it was only one thing, that he had made a mistake about Sybil.

But, whether or not, he would not be an orchid. And after that flashing resolution the end was certain. He would *not* be badgered into the House of Commons, he

would not be part of Society, he would not do the Season and wear a top-hat and be crushed and flattened at these parties nightly. He would go on with his painting, however poor, because he believed in it; he would consort with simple people, the modest primrose or the graceful daffodil, but not, if he could help it, with the *Orchidaceae*.

Slowly and painfully he broke these heretical resolutions to Sybil.

'My dear,' said her mother, 'it sounds like the Savage Club. He must be one of these Bohemians. Lost caste. It's terrible. But you know, his grandmother . . . A throw-back, I suppose. Well, one thing's certain, dear, you can't marry a Bohemian. Your father would resign.'

Sybil, too, saw the end approaching, threw off a lecture or two, tried tears and entreaties, and at last, preferring to be mistress of her fate, released him gracefully, before he had dared to think of such a thing.

He then went to Iceland, painted glaciers and whalers and grew a beard. He came back after eight months, removed the beard, and settled down as a paying-guest in the Ravens' home. He liked the river, he liked the stolid Raven, and, for a time, he liked Mrs. Raven too, though Sybil had planted in him an unfortunate prejudice against educated women; and Mrs. Raven was very highly educated.

For a year he lived there happily, working very hard; and during this time he became acquainted with most of the modern young artists. A painter with money was a portent among them, and a pleasant one; and they argued that a young man who drew such very triangular legs must have something in him. Many of his pictures seemed to have so little meaning that it was suspected that their meaning was profound. And, being modern and fluid and likely, as they knew, to overflow into some wild new phase themselves at any moment, they took a generous view of other men's triangles, lest the next day they should burst into rhomboids or polygons. Besides, he was jolly company at a studio party, and mixed well with everybody, whether it was Russians or Bloomsbury, or the Campden Hill crowd, or theatre people; danced well, drank well, could eat

kippers in the early morning, and never rammed his triangles down other people's throats. He went to the play now and then, but not to those which he would have seen with Sybil, because everybody else had seen them, and never to 'first nights'. He kept a boat at the bottom of the garden, and with the Thames to play with had no need for golf-clubs or any other elaborate exercise. He was now bronzed and muscular and tall, and with his little moustache had a fresh-air, military appearance strangely out of tune with his extraordinary pictures, which, one would have said, had grown up unhealthily, like mustard and cress in a cellar. He liked pretty women, but did not run after them; often they ran after him; but he had learned wariness and was never seriously entangled. Indeed, in the studio world there seemed to be few serious entanglements, which was a great part of its charm. All that absurd ritual and tradition of the orchid world and the stage, where a kiss must mean a marriage or else a divorce, and there is nothing between friendship and passion, had no existence. These gay, free people had too little time and money to be thinking always of marriage, and too good hearts for the Sybilline traditions. They met and liked each other and kissed sometimes in corners, and went on with their work without making a drama of it. Yet the sacred institution of monogamy was perhaps as sacred and certainly as safe in the abandoned studios as it was under more respectable roofs.

It was only Mrs. Raven who drove Gordon from the Ravens'. For Mrs. Raven would make a drama of it.

Mrs. Raven, like Sybil, was intellectually starved; and Mr. Bryan thought it hard that he should be loved by two women in that condition. Unlike Sybil, Mrs. Raven admired his paintings. She had been a wrangler at Cambridge, so perhaps had a tendency to triangles. Honest John Raven worked hard and late at the office, and sometimes brought home papers with him, or if not he talked 'housing' or threw off little anecdotes about 'National Insurance'. The advent of Mr. Bryan had brightened Mrs. Raven's life, though she did not see enough of him. She was busy with house and family all day, and many evenings he was out. They were upon terms of easy

companionship, or so he thought; she was young and attractive in a soft and velvety style; and she had always seemed sensible except on the rare occasions when she entered his painting-room or talked about his work. She spoke then in such terms of extravagant praise that he thought she must be mad. Fothergill, Anstey, Backhouse, the names of all the best modern artists tripped discredited from her lips. Mr. Bryan's triangles were better than any of them. He was the Michael Angelo of triangles, a wonder, a genius. Mrs. Raven's praise of his pictures gave him an uncomfortable feeling that they were no good. So for a long time he had not invited her to see them.

She had hinted once or twice that she was ready, even anxious, to sit for him. He could not imagine why; for he had no illusions about his style of painting, and he knew very well that John Raven would hate to see his soft, round wife turned into triangles with a stove-pipe in the background. Besides, he had not the least impulse to paint her; she suggested nothing to him. So her sitting had been as politely as possible postponed or discouraged.

And then one day, poor creature, she had blurted without warning into drama. They were sitting after tea in the cool drawing-room which looked out on the river. He was filling his pipe and she was turning over the pages of a recent volume of free verse which she had bought at a charity bazaar. She was trying to like it because it gave her the same sensations as Gordon's triangular pictures, so she supposed it must be good. There seemed to be no particular reason why any line had begun or ended where it did rather than somewhere else. Many of them consisted of a single monosyllable, such as the word 'what'; and these made the nearest approach to a definite metre or rhythm. Many of the words and phrases were pleasant-sounding in themselves, but could they have been shaken in a sack and written down again in the order in which they fell out the poems would have seemed the same. Strange things happened in this verse. Flowers were noisy and rain was green, tables had rhythm and carpets sang; while bisons, parrots, and elephants were common objects, whether the poem was about passion or the Piccadilly Railway. And for the words bison, parrot or elephant,

the words lobster, parasol or inkstand, or any other words, could almost anywhere have been substituted without injuring the sense. But the parrots had as much reason to be there as Mr. Bryan's stove-pipes, so Mrs. Raven did not know what to think.

'What do you think of that?' she said, and handed him the book, open at a poem called 'Passion'.

He read through the poem, giving his mind to it, so that his pipe went out. The words made no impression on his mind at all. They might have been a price-list or a catalogue of bulbs. But he too saw that this work had a sort of kinship to triangular legs, and with the cautious generosity of one modern to another he said:

'Alive, isn't it? Got something in her.'

'Yes.'

He lit another match and puffed at his pipe. She watched him. It was a pipe which she had given him for Christmas, a hygienic pipe with an aluminium tube in it. The pipe did not draw. The pipe, instead of allowing the smoker to absorb the poison by degrees, stored it up in the tube and at intervals expelled it into the mouth in one concentrated dose.

'I wish,' he said, puffing, 'that some one would sell an ordinary, Christian, unhealthy pipe. These hygienic things are enough to make a man give up smoking.' He had forgotten who had given him the pipe. And whether because of this or because of the poem called 'Passion', Mrs. Raven suddenly clenched her hands, went very white, and said:

'Why are you so cruel to me?'

He looked at her, astonished. Her face was changed, hard and suffering as he had never seen it.

'Of course, it's your pipe,' he said. 'I'm sorry. I forgot.'

'Why have you come here and ruined my life?' she said stubbornly, not looking at him but at the fireplace.

'What do you mean?' he said.

'I love you. Didn't you know?'

Alarming information! He stood up and knocked out the full pipe in the fireplace.

'Why did you do that?' she said.

He stared stupidly at the smouldering dottle in the clean grate.

'I can't think,' he said. What a question!

She stood up and came to him and took hold of his coat and looked up hungrily into his face.

'And you don't like me at all,' she said. 'Not a bit.'

'Yes, I do.'

'No, you don't.'

'But of course I do!'

'Do you really? Very much?'

'Of course,' he said again. Absurd conversation!

'Say it! Say "I like you very much!"'

'I like you very much,' he said stiffly, appalled by her eagerness.

'Say you love me! Say it!'

'Good God, Margaret, what's the matter with you?' He did not seem to know this wild young matron who was clinging to him. She was possessed—a different creature. He could hear her children yelling in the garden. He was horrified—not because she had said so much, but because he could say so little. What a bore Love could be!

'I love you,' she whispered. 'I'd do anything for you—run away with you, leave everything. I'm sick of it. You've done this, Gordon, don't you know? But you're so blind. I've bottled it up all these months, but now I don't care. You've ruined everything, Gordon, and you must give me something.'

She gripped his coat and again looked up at him with that terrible appeal in her eyes. He was stirred by compassion and humility and pride, as any man must be to whom such things are said. And he put his arms round her and held her close and kissed her, not as he felt, but as he thought she wanted. Even as he embraced her it crossed his mind that he should be feeling guilty in this, the classic situation of wrongdoing, but instead he had a horrid sensation that he was doing a good action. She was a young, soft, clinging creature in his arms, and he liked her; but that was all. It was embarrassing. But pretty women, after all, had to suffer this sort of embarrassment all the days of their lives. The great thing was to be kind.

He put her gently away. She gave a deep sigh of content. And then, insatiable, she whispered again, 'Say you love me, Gordon.'

But he would not say that.

'It isn't much,' she insisted. 'Say you love me a little.'

He began, 'But I——' But he could not finish that either. He thought that perhaps it would have been kinder to be cruel from the first. He said softly, 'Don't, Margaret.'

She became suddenly sane again, and sank on to a sofa. Light your pipe,' she said pathetically.

He kissed her hand and took his pipe and went out.

He had given her something—all that he could—and he hoped foolishly that this would be enough. But always her eyes, her voice, told him that it was not enough. That compassionate embrace had been too kind, and whenever they were alone he knew that she was waiting for, willing him to be kind again. The part of Joseph is not one that can be played for ever by a paying-guest, and for many good reasons he had no mind to play any other. And so he set about looking for a studio.

It was a queer thing, he reflected, that the first appointment he made for the studio should be with the maidservant of Mrs. Raven, who wanted so much to sit for him.

IX

THE BLUSH

THE studio was beside the river too, fifty yards above the *Blackbird*, with a small bare yard running down to the river-wall. Like most studios, it looked a poor place for any kind of study. It had a piano, a bed, an anthracite stove, a divan, a sink, easels, a gas-ring, and the usual mess ; and at the end, behind a partition, a small lumber-room and a bathroom. On the shelves, and on the floor, and on the walls were the works of Mr. Bryan. He had never been able to display so many in one place before ; he had taken some time and trouble over the arranging ; and it was now possible to see in order of time the successive stages of Mr. Bryan's art. There were the caricatures of Eton days, which, though deliberately setting out to distort their subjects, were much nearer to being likenesses than any of the later portraits. Then there were the early post-Eton triangles, with subjects for the most part imaginative and abstract, and titles vague, like 'Mêlée', 'Rout', 'Conflict', and 'Azimuth'; then the more virile, but still triangular, portraits of the *Sea Horse* period ; and then the Australian work. Here could be detected a slight lapse into the naturalistic ; partly because somehow he had not seen the sunny spaces of Australia with quite the same triangular eye, and partly, perhaps, because the brutal Australians had said things. Also, in that continent he had yielded a little to the influence of a native artist, Mr. Norman Lindsay, who had discovered a new use for the firmament in art, and filled it with coveys of naked women. In Mr. Lindsay's pictures it rained naked women, while in the foreground the fruitful earth erupted naked women in great numbers and in postures of infinite variety and wildness. And at this stage there began to appear in Mr. Bryan's skies an occasional flock of naked women in flight, but still, of course, with breasts like gargoyles and behinds like cardboard boxes. After these

there came the Iceland, whaler and glacier pictures, and these, having followed the revolt against Sybil and the orchids, were more in the old geometrical, rebellious style. The last, or Hammersmith, period, showed a greater variety; for, to tell the truth, the artist at this time was in something of a muddle; or, as an art critic would have put it, his genius was still fluid. There were some of the old stove-pipe pictures and one or two large pictures full of cubic women in the Lindsay-Bryan style, and there were some river scenes of the Australian natural kind, and he had done one or two paintings of barges up the canal or at the wharves which really were very like barges. He liked painting a barge because it could easily be made to look like a barge and a coloured proposition of Euclid as well.

But, besides painting, he had during this period launched out into other arts as well. Sometimes, after a barren morning, it crossed his mind that what he was really intended for was a sculptor or a woodcarver. So now and then he bought clay and modelled clay in the rugged style of Mr. Epstein, or so he thought; he had carved two or three walking-sticks for friends and made some experiments in etching. And the tools and the products of these various arts were no mean part of the furniture of the studio.

He could not tell why, but he was mildly excited by the thought of Jane's visit, and took more trouble to set things in order than he had ever done for a model before. It was a shock, somehow, to see her come in in her 'day-out' clothes —the red hat and the dark red coat and skirt. He had never seen her except in her cap and apron or her work-a-day dress, and had forgotten, as one does of policemen, that she might have other clothes.

She was not shy, nor yet forward, though she too was excited.

'You've a nice place, haven't you?' she said. 'What a lot of pictures!'

'Have a look round,' he said. 'But you've seen most of them, I suppose?'

'Some of them,' she said, making a grave inspection of the Lindsay period. 'Did you do all these, Mr. Bryan?'

'Yes.'

'Oh! Florry said she thought some of them were done by a child.'

She made this statement simply, without humorous intention.

'Did she indeed?' said the artist. 'And what do you think of them?'

'I can't make them out,' she said after a pause. 'They don't seem like *you*, somehow, Mr. Bryan. Oh, barges!' and she passed on eagerly to the Hammersmith period. 'Brentford, isn't that?'

'Yes.'

It was ridiculous, but the modern painter was definitely pleased because Jane Bell, who brought up his morning tea, had recognized his picture of Brentford Lock as a picture of Brentford Lock.

'But when the lock empties,' said Jane disappointedly after another examination, 'that barge will drift under the bridge.'

'Will it?' said the artist. 'Why?'

'Because she isn't tied up.'

It was quite absurd—he remembered how he had ignored the mooring lines of that barge, for the very good reason that they did not fit into the pattern of his picture but cut across it and spoiled it—it was absurd, but now he was sorry that he had left the barge defenceless and untethered so that she would charge sideways under the bridge when the lock was emptied, as he had known very well would happen.

'Quite right,' he said humbly.

'You ought to know better than that, Mr. Bryan,' said Jane, encouraged.

'I do,' he said, almost conscience-stricken. 'And what about this one?'

'This one' was the portrait of a lady. She stood before a set of airy banisters which were not attached to any stair and did not reach the floor. Her face was partly dark green and partly pale green, like the parti-coloured seas of Cornwall. She had only one eye, and that was a large oval of white specks which overflowed on to the spaces usually reserved for the nose and forehead. She had two

breasts, one the size of a melon and the other no larger than a plum. Her hair, unhappily, grew only on one side and hung down over her left shoulder in melancholy snake-like wisps, some black, some cream-coloured. Across her stomach she held her right forearm, which, affected with some form of elephantiasis, grew larger and larger from elbow to wrist and terminated in a monstrous talon. Beside her sat another female shape of similar appearance, but with a white face and green hair. The only other object in the picture was a table, but the table was drawn severely in the normal likeness of a table, with straight legs and a square top. It seemed strange that such a painter and such ladies should have to do with so commonplace a table. Without the table the ladies might have been taken for supernatural or fantastic creatures, griffins, gnomes, or extinct monsters; but this dull perpendicular kitchen-table made it clear that these misshapen horrors were female human beings.

Jane gazed at the standing lady, lost in wonder. She thought of her own body and of Lily's pretty body, which were the only bodies she knew: and she wondered that a nice gentleman like Mr. Bryan could make something which she knew was ugly out of something which she felt was beautiful.

Mr. Bryan watched her, wondering what she would say. His artistic friends looked at that picture and said, 'Best thing you've done'; his semi-artistic friends scratched their heads and murmured, 'I see what you mean . . .'; Mr. Raven had said, 'My God!'

Jane said at last, 'Is she a relation of yours, Mr. Bryan?'

Mr. Bryan said 'No.' He thought she meant that only some close family tie could excuse what he had done, and laughed; but she meant that she did not want to be rude about a sister or an aunt.

'Well, I'm sorry for the man she marries,' said Jane. 'Are you going to paint me like that, Mr. Bryan?'

'I'd like to some time,' he said, 'if you wouldn't mind.'

Jane blushed, because she saw that 'like that' might mean 'with nothing on', though she had meant with one eye and a green face. But Mr. Bryan's figures were

so modern that it was difficult to realize that they had nothing on.

He saw the blush, and said, 'Of course, I wanted to do you washing up, in your working clothes.'

'Don't you like these?'

'Not for painting,' he said tactfully. 'But never mind. I wonder how this would suit you?' He held up a red velvet frock which had been worn by many models of about Jane's dimensions.

'Red's my colour,' said Jane, eyeing the dress with favour.

'Well, would you mind? You can change in the bathroom.'

Changing, Jane felt excited and reckless. 'I'm in one of my moods,' she thought. 'Ready for anything.' She fancied herself in the red velvet, which fitted her very fairly; the looking-glass was only a foot square, and too high for her, but by kneeling on the edge of the bath she could see enough of herself to be sure that she looked well. '*Jane Dons the Purple*' she thought. Perhaps this was the first move upon the road to queendom; and she stepped across the studio as dignified a pawn as possible. But it was a pity her hands were so pink and rough from washing-up, and her shoes went oddly with the dress.

'That's fine,' said Mr. Bryan. 'Now sit down and be comfortable.'

Jane sat on the divan and stared fixedly at the easel, like a person about to be photographed or cross-examined.

'Sit anyhow,' he said, 'and talk, till I see what I want.'

'Talk, Mr. Bryan? What about?'

'Anything. Tell me the story of your life. Where do you live, and why do you bring me tea in the morning?'

He felt suddenly ashamed that he knew so little of this fellow-creature who had lived and slept and worked in the same house. He knew that she could sail a boat, for he had seen her. By accident he knew that she had a good figure; perhaps, all unsuspected, she had a soul or a massive intellect. She might have hopes, fears, ambitions, passions, love-affairs; men might be mad about her; she might be married; but all he knew was that she brought up the morning tea, did the stair-rods and the washing, carried

in the next course, and sometimes sent his shirts to the wash with his links in them. He knew that domestic servants had private lives, because now and then they cropped up and interfered with Mrs. Raven's arrangements, but they were always hidden and unconsidered, like their legs.

'Well, we live on the barge—you know that——' began Jane.

'Yes, of course. I saw you bathing one Sunday.'

'I never saw you, Mr. Bryan.'

'I looked through the fence,' said Mr. Bryan. 'Very rude of me.'

'A lot of people do,' said Jane, matter-of-fact. 'It's Lily. She will show off. Lily's my sister. Father's stopped up the holes now,' she added.

'Is Lily the fair one?'

'Yes. One of Nature's butterflies, we tell her.'

'Well, she's got a lovely figure,' said the artist, busily drawing. 'So have you.'

'*The Shackles of Convention Fall Away,*' thought Jane. 'My figure!' In two years neither Fred nor Ernest had detected her figure. But now she did not blush. Indeed, the human picture of Mr. Bryan peeping through the fence at Lily bathing was a bond between them, and she felt easier. This was what had always drawn her to Mr. Bryan, that he seemed to know that a person was a human being. '*Acquaintance Ripens Into Friendship,*' she thought, and she put her hands behind her and leaned back, because that was more comfortable, and they *were* so pink.

'That's fine,' he said. 'Stay like that. How much do you earn?'

'Eighteen shillings a week.'

'Good God!' he said.

'Well, I'm getting more now, since the Derby, because five nights a week I help at the "Black Swan". That's another nine shillings, you see.'

'Behind the bar?'

'Yes.'

'After working all day at the house?'

'Yes, Mr. Bryan. It's a lot of standing. But I can do it.'

'Good God!' he said again, and drew in silence for a little.

'You could get more for sitting,' he said at last.

'Sitting, Mr. Bryan?'

'Sitting for painters. Like this. It's half a crown an hour, you know. You've earned one and threepence already,' he added, jocular.

'Oh, but I didn't come for *that*!' cried Jane, aghast. 'I only came to oblige you, Mr. Bryan.'

'Oh, but you must——'

'I wouldn't think of it!' '*Where Money Passes, Love Must Halt*', she knew.

'Oh, well, never mind that,' he said, respecting and astonished by her distress. 'But you could get a lot of work. I'll introduce you to some friends of mine. Would you like it?'

'I couldn't say, Mr. Bryan.'

The idea that any one would pay her half a crown an hour for sitting in a chair was difficult to grasp.

'Sitting's better than standing, you know. Better than washing-up.'

Better than washing-up—the everlasting washing-up: the grease, the steam, the plates with butter on them, the water too hot for the hands or too cold for the grease, the scouring of pans, the hunting for knives in the foul basin, the heat and smell, the sink stopped up, the tea-leaves glued into the teapot, the mustard and the bits of food, the corners of the milk-jug, the drying and piling, the carting of the plates and hanging up of cups, and then a new pile of dirty things discovered somewhere; the rough, pink hands! No more washing-up—what a dream! No more rough hands.

'Is it really half a crown an hour?' she asked.

'Some models get more. But it's hard work, you know. You have to sit very still.'

She made a swift calculation. If she did this strange sitting-still for six hours a day, which was surely easy, she would earn fifteen shillings in a day—nearly a week's wages!

'Well, I'd like to try,' she said. 'Of course, I wouldn't worry if it hadn't been for the Derby and Dad losing his job.'

'How was that?'

Feeling now as easy as if she were talking to Lily, she began the long tale of the Bell misfortunes, the Black Prince, the Derby, and the load of debt, how she felt responsible for everything because of that free pass at the cinema, and how she had jumped at Mrs. Higgins's kind offer of work in the evenings, and Lily's frivolity and Florry's laziness, and everything. But the tale was all courage and charity and never complaining. Mr. Bryan listened, thrilled and admiring, and pleased with himself because he had been right. She *was* a brave little soul. He found himself, fantastically, comparing her with Sybil, and thought, 'She's real; she's a real person.' It was wonderful that all the time he had known this girl she had had all these excitements in the background of her life, this wild barge existence, with the lunatic cornet-player who could stake his last hundred on an outsider; and yet she had never shown a sign of it. Even, no doubt, on the morning after that Derby she had come up, as cool and quiet as usual, with the morning tea, as if there were nothing else in the world that was in her mind but his tea, and John Raven's bath, and Mrs. Raven's children. Almost without noticing it he could have paid off that debt to Mr. Bell's Liverpool aunt and the trifling pound or two to Mrs. Higgins. But instead of that this little girl was standing for long evenings behind the bar at the 'Black Swan' after long days of every kind of labour at the Ravens'. So far apart were their worlds, though they had slept on the same floor, they were like two stars which revolve about each other and never touch. Now he felt himself drawn towards the Bell family; he longed to present Mr. Bell with a glorious winner, and Lily with suitable employment, and Jane with whatever her heart desired. But probably he would never be allowed to help; she would not even take half a crown for sitting. If Jane had not been quite good to look at he would never have heard of the Bell misfortunes; neither, he reflected honestly, would he have cared to hear about them.

She was, without doubt, good to look at. Now she was at ease and talking about Lily, her small face had thrown off its domestic livery and was alive and human as he had

never seen it at the Ravens' ; but often would return that expression of thoughtful gravity which had first attracted him, seeming to say that she carried a wealth of responsibility on her small shoulders. She had an unconscious trick of lowering her head and looking upward with those profound brown eyes, while she made with great solemnity a remark of no importance, as when she had said that Mr. Bell had stopped up the holes in the fence. This habit pleased him, he did not know why. It was as if her mind were far away with matters of infinite moment ; and indeed at these times she was generally thinking of her high Destiny or plucking some fine flowered phrase from her anthology of captions.

Her voice pleased him too. She dropped no aitches ; she said ' you see ' too often, and there were little phrases and inflections which Sybil would have classed as ' common ' ; but as the tale of the Derby flowed softly on it did not weary him as the lordly drawl or manufactured sparkle of Sybil's friends had wearied him. And how much better was the tale of the Derby to hear than any one's opinions about the ' Expressionist drama ' or ' rhythm in painting '. It was very strange that he should be thinking so much about Sybil, who had not entered his head for many weeks. And now he said suddenly, ' Is Ernest your young man ? '

' He is and he isn't,' said Jane. ' So is Fred. But I'm not potty about either of them.'

He was somehow pleased that she was not potty about Ernest or Fred.

' Is Ernest potty ? ' he asked.

' He makes out he is, Mr. Bryan. But he's a Socialist, so it may be all talk. Fred's potty, I think, but he don't say much. It's all vice versa in this life, isn't it ? And that reminds me, I ought to be going, Mr. Bryan.'

' Fred ? '

' No, it's Ernest to-night.'

' Very well, but you must come again.'

He stood up and surveyed what he had done. And Good Lord ! ' he said. What he had done, a pencil drawing, was extraordinary. Without intending it, even without noticing it, he had drawn Jane in a new style—a style not his own : no triangles, no cubes or stove-pipes,

but a simple figure with two eyes, with a nose and a mouth and two arms the same size—a figure, moreover, which was quite like Jane. He had come very near to the unforgivable in art, a resemblance, almost a 'photograph'. What did this mean?

When foolish Philistine persons disparaged his pictures of ladies because the ladies of their acquaintance were more curved than cornered, more round than oblong, and rarely had bright green faces, he was accustomed to answer that that was how he *saw* the ladies in question; he was true to his vision, and there it was. But why had he not seen Jane Bell with a green face and a rectangular nose? Could it be that her rock-like sanity had infected him? Could it be that he was so much interested in Jane Bell that he had forgotten about art and drawn her naturally, as the spirit moved him?

'It's nice,' she said behind him. 'I like it better than the others.'

'Do you? So do I,' he said, and wondered what the Neo-Post-Impressionists would think of so treasonable a statement.

'I'll give you some introductions,' he said; and while she took off the red dress he scribbled three notes, wondering with a private chuckle how the wild Potts and Latimer and Jefferson would *see* Jane Bell. It would be amusing, he thought, to arrange an exhibition, in which there should be nothing but pictures of Jane Bell by thirty modern painters. *Then* the Philistines would see how different the same object could appear to different eyes.

'Take these as soon as you can,' he said. 'Not in the morning. Well, of course, you can't. And will you come next Friday?'

'Very well, Mr. Bryan.'

'But next time it's business, you understand.'

'Business, Mr. Bryan?'

'Three hours. And half a crown an hour.'

'Oh, no, Mr. Bryan. I couldn't do that.'

'Is it the time?'

'No, the money.' She would *not* take money from him.

'You funny child!' he said. 'Then I can't ask you to come.'

She wavered. This was terrible. She must come again.

'Well, we'll see about it, shall we?' she said at last. Anyhow, I'll come.'

'Very well. Good-bye.'

They shook hands, and smiled at each other like old friends, and she went out gay and delighted by she knew not what. But she knew that she meant to be a model, and, after a study of her envelopes, she took a penny bus to the studio of Mr. Potts.

Ernest had fits that evening when he heard that Jane had visited four *bourgeois* artists in the same afternoon. But they were nothing to the fits which Ernest had on the following Friday evening.

Jane had a good report to make to Mr. Bryan that day. Mr. Potts and Mr. Latimer had both booked her for six mornings, and Mr. Jefferson had made vague promises. She had given Mrs. Raven a week's notice from Saturday, and in two days would be a professional model.

'Fine,' said Mr. Bryan. 'I'll give you some more letters.' But it crossed his mind that poor Mrs. Raven would be in a fuss again, looking for another girl. And so she was.

'There's only one thing, Mr. Bryan,' said Jane slowly, looking at the floor. 'Mr. Potts said that he might want me to sit in the nude, you see, and, what I was wondering, would there be many like that?'

'Very likely. Do you mind?'

'I don't know,' said Jane, troubled. 'I was wondering would a girl lose caste? Because I wouldn't want to lose caste. Ernest says that a girl loses caste if she sits in her clothes; but, of course, Ernest would say anything.'

'No, you wouldn't lose caste,' said Mr. Bryan gravely. 'Many models have married great men. Would Ernest rather you went on washing-up?'

'You can't tell with Ernest. He wouldn't be satisfied if every one was the Archbishop of Canterbury. But would *you* think the worse of me, Mr. Bryan?'

'Why should I? I want to paint you myself.'

'I don't think I'd mind if it was you,' she said.

'Well, would you like to try it? This afternoon?'

'Yes, Mr. Bryan.'

'What about your father?'

'I shall tell him I did it for a bet,' she said. 'Then he won't mind. He doesn't count, poor dear.'

Undressing in the bathroom, Jane told herself that she must be a 'wanton', because, for all her palaver, she did not mind at all. She knew that she ought to be trembling with modesty and hot with shame. Lily had said that in such a case she would die of shame, but Jane had told Lily that no one would have guessed it from the way she went on when she was bathing; and now she thought that in this matter she and Lily were perhaps a pair, for she was glad to be undressing for Mr. Bryan to see her, only she hoped that he would not give her one of those lop-sided busts like the lady with the green face. Fine feathers might make fine birds, but with nothing on she was as good as any one, so she had often thought when she undressed at night, '*Clothes do not Make the Gentleman*', as everybody knew. Once or twice she had seen photographs of Society girls bathing in France, and they looked just like Lily or herself. Mr. Bryan had noticed this figure of hers when he saw her bathing; he did not like her best clothes, and now when he saw her as she really was, without cap and apron, and nothing to show that she was a woman of the proletariat, or whatever it was, perhaps he would realize that she was no ordinary girl. She peeped in the little glass and decided that no one could tell her from the Duchess of York. She had forgotten to take off her pearl necklace, but thought that it looked well, and kept it on.

Nevertheless, she did feel pink as she sat down on the divan and held back the cloak to let it fall from her shoulders. She had a horrid fear that her arms were blushing again, and, looking down, found that it was true; and so much did she resent this that she was ready to wrap the cloak round her again.

'I blush down my arms,' she said. 'Silly, isn't it?'

He said quickly, 'That's an idea. Could you stay like that?'

None of his models had ever blushed before, and now she had given him an extraordinary idea—extraordinary, that is, for a Neo-Post-Impressionist or triangular portrait-painter—and that idea was to paint her exactly as she was,

to capture the shy moment of unveiling, her hands above her shoulders holding the cloak, and the delicate flush in her face and neck. The picture would be called 'The Blush', or 'The First Sitting', and it would be sadly like an Academy picture—a picture with a story, or a coloured illustration in a Society weekly. Indeed, by the subject, the picture was doomed to be academic, for even Potts or Latimer would hardly attempt to paint a blush that was green. But such was the strange influence of this servant girl that the academic no longer revolted him. She made him *feel* academic. All the last week, since her first visit to the studio, his painting-mind had been in a muddle. He had twice sent his green-lady model away because he could not go on with her latest portrait, in which her face was pale blue. The upper part of her was almost completed in various shades of blue; but now, when he looked at her legs they appeared to be flesh-coloured; and since she could scarcely be a mixture of flesh colour and blue, it was difficult to proceed. Her breasts, which had once, without doubt, been irregular polygons, were now inexplicably round; and the saucepan in the background seemed to have lost much of its significance. So in despair he had fallen back upon some of his miscellaneous arts, had moulded two fire-dogs, and begun carving a cigarette-box.

'It will be tiring,' he said. 'Say when you're tired.' And he began work eagerly. This time there was no talking.

Not for a long time had he been so excited by a piece of work. He had painted too long to be excited by the nude as such. Very few of his sitters had moved him personally—they stirred him no more than a naked leg of mutton; indeed, some who had seemed to have a faint attraction with their clothes on had lost it the moment they took them off. To paint from the nude, so far from encouraging passion and immorality, is in most cases, for the artist, a wholesome experience; and many a non-artist might be the better for it. So it could not be the spectacle of Jane's slim young middle and small young breasts which excited him. But, whatever the cause, none of her podgy predecessors had made him feel with such absolute confidence that the picture he was making would be the greatest picture in the world. Whatever the cause, he was

as much inflamed by this new adventure into academic art as he had been, he remembered, when he first began to draw noses in squares.

After twenty minutes he let her have a rest. After another twenty minutes he made her some tea. 'You sit splendidly,' he told her, and she was pleased. Jane had found out already that this sitting was not, after all, such an easy job. She grew stiff and tired very soon; she had pins and needles in the first half, and cramp in the second; and she reflected curiously that all relations with men seemed to lead in the end to cramp and pins and needles, for she had had them both with the placid Fred and the passionate Ernest. The pose was a severe one and too much for a beginner. But after tea Mr. Bryan was more feverishly possessed by art than ever. He saw by the clock that twenty minutes had passed, but thought that Jane seemed happy and could stand another minute or two. Every minute taken from the picture seemed a deprivation, an outrage, a crime against humanity. Engrossed, entranced, he forgot about time, and about humanity. And Jane, it is true, was happy enough. She was blissful. She could see his eagerness, and rejoiced in it; but she hoped it was more for herself than the picture. For now she had decided that Mr. Bryan was the Valentino of her life. Her arms ached, her fingers tingled, she had to pinch the cloak to be sure that it was still there; her back was stiff, her eyes drowsy, and the weight of her head upon her neck was unendurable; yet she endured it. Not for any reward would she have stopped him. She fixed her eyes upon his face, and, with the thought of him, kept herself erect and lively, thinking that by this ordeal and suffering she was giving herself to him and yet being respectable, though Ernest, no doubt, might have something to say. The thought of Ernest and what he might have to say mysteriously revived her. For some reason she looked forward, maliciously, to telling Ernest that she had sat before Mr. Bryan with nothing on; and this thought preserved her for another five minutes. But she felt suddenly cold and bloodless in the face, she felt that something was going to happen to her, she could do nothing to prevent it, there was a singing in her ears, a buzzing in her

head, Mr. Bryan worked on happily at her legs, and Jane fainted.

When she came to she saw Mr. Bryan's face close to hers, she felt his arms supporting her, and she closed her eyes quickly, wishing that this state of things should continue. He had picked her up, and, not having much knowledge of faints, laid her upon the couch, fetched water in a cup and sprinkled it on her forehead, for he had read that this was done. She lay so like the dead that he lifted her up and feebly held the cup before her lips, as if the expectation of this draught might restore her. Pathetic little morsel! Her hands were rough and her hair wanted a wash. And he thought of Sybil Colebatch, with her scents and skin-creams and frequent baths.

He kissed her lightly, compassionately, without excitement, as one pats the head of a dog. But to Jane this was such pleasure that she thought she might faint again indeed. She lay quiet in happy abandon, savouring her joy. She had forgotten her faintness, she had forgotten she was naked, she was alone with Mr. Bryan, who had kissed her, and she was beginning to live like the pictures. She opened her eyes at last and smiled at him and showed him a face transfigured and radiant. He was astonished, but he kissed her again, lightly again, though not so lightly as before.

But Jane asked no more ; an electric flame shot through her and she was sure that at last she had found Love's Bliss.

Then he stood up, a little ashamed of himself, and wrapped the cloak about her.

X

HANDS OFF CROATIA!

JANE behaved badly to Ernest that evening. For a special treat he took her to the Palais de Danse because he felt that on the previous Friday he had been a little harsh with her, perhaps, about the artists. After two dances Jane suggested that they should sit down and have a lemon-squash. She was elated and bored, she could think of nothing but Mr. Bryan, and she could not be bothered to follow the laborious steps of Ernest, or suffer gladly a succession of collisions. Ernest did not want a squash, and the one attraction of a dance for him was that for long periods he might, without protest, hold Jane in his arms. If they were going to sit remotely in different chairs and suck squashes through straws, he had much better have saved his money and hugged her for nothing under the elm-tree.

But he consented with a good grace, and ordered the drinks. He complained, however, of the number of people who were there in evening-dress, and said it was time that sort of flummery was done away with, especially at a place which was intended for 'the People'. Jane said she liked to see them; it made a change. Ernest said that Labour would make a change one of these days, and Jane laughed heartily. She laughed at everything he said, sucking at her squash and teasing him with her eyes over the straws. She thought that Ernest was a poor fish to-night.

'You're a cold cod, aren't you, Ernest?' she said, pitying him.

Ernest stared at her, annoyed. She had never ventured to pity him before. 'Here, what's the game?' he said; and then, suspiciously, 'What you been doing this afternoon?'

'Nothing much,' she said casually. 'I've been sitting again.'

'Oh, you have, have you? Where?'

'In the nude.'

'Sitting in the——' began Ernest. 'What d'you mean?'

'The nude. Nothing. I earned five shillings.' This was not quite true, for she had refused the five shillings; but she thought the five shillings might mollify Ernest's economic mind. He was every bit as indignant as she had hoped.

'Do you mean to say,' said he, 'that you've been sitting *stripped* before a man?'

'M'm,' said Jane, nodding, through her straw.

'Well, I'm——' said Ernest, too staggered for comment. 'What's his name?'

'Bryan.'

'The same fellow? The one that was lodger at your place?'

'That's right.'

'Anybody else there?'

'No.'

'Just you and him?'

'You heard what I said.'

'Well, I'll wring his bloody neck!'

Jane's drink came to an end with a derisive gurgle.

'What'll you do that for, Ernest?' she said politely.

Ernest glared, maddened by her tone and by his own suspicions.

'Did he interfere with you?'

'Oh, yes, of course—you would think of that!'

'Well, did he?'

'No, he didn't. And if you're going to be rude I'm going.'

She turned away from him and looked at the dancers. A waltz was being played; the white lights had been turned down and the floor was illumined by coloured rays from both ends of the room. The colours changed every few seconds, and the dancers drifted round with expressions of unspeakable melancholy, now green, now heliotrope, and now bright yellow. Jane felt romantic, but not for Ernest. Still, weak as ever, she thought, she was a little ashamed of the way she had behaved. For she did not really feel bold and wanton about Mr. Bryan, but rather humble. But that was the strange part of Ernest: somehow he always provoked her to do things which made her sorry afterwards.

'Well, you're a nice one!' he said at last, and she was sorry no longer. 'Feel proud of yourself, I dare say?'

'Didn't you say I ought to raise my stattus?'

'Of course I did. But if you think you've raised your stattus, I don't. You've lost caste, I should say. Respectable girls don't act that way.'

'We're very polite, aren't we? Didn't you tell me domestic service was a degrading thraldom?'

'Dare say I did.'

'Well, I've given my notice. I'm going to be a model. I've raised my stattus. I'm a professional woman, see?'

'You're not going on with it?'

'Aren't I, then? I've got engagements.'

'In the nude?'

'I dare say,' said Jane. 'I'm not particular,' as if she had been a model for twenty years.

'Well, if you're not particular, I am.'

'What's it got to do with you, Ernest?'

'Look here, my girl——'

'I'm not your girl.'

'Well, you can please yourself, but if you can't act respectable, you and me will part, that's all.'

'All right,' said Jane, 'let's part.' And she stood up, really angry now. 'You're very respectable all of a sudden, aren't you? Long may it last!'

This stroke went home, for in Ernest's confused wrath there was perhaps more envy than moral horror or solicitude for Jane. The idea that a casual *bourgeois*, no doubt as unscrupulous as all capitalists, should have received from Jane a privilege denied to her honest proletarian admirer, inflamed and scorched him; and who shall blame him for that?

'No offence, Jane,' he said, changing his tone, for he did not want to part from Jane, sit in the nude or no. 'Can't you see I'm only thinking of you? What do you know about the man? Sit down, do. You don't see what I mean.'

But Jane, finding that a firm word worked wonders, even with Ernest, was tasting power and enjoying it. It was strange and fine to have the mighty Ernest in this humble state, and it would do no harm to keep him thus. She would not sit down, and they left the hall of revelry in silence.

They walked in the road, as everybody does in King

Street in the evening, and on the way Ernest developed the notion that he was only thinking of her. What he meant was, how was she to know that one of these artists would not take advantage of her? They were a queer lot, by all accounts; well, all he could say was, if one of them so much as touched her, he, Ernest, would murder him.

Jane said, 'I can take care of myself, thank you, and you can leave my friends alone.'

Ernest, with a new and more dreadful suspicion, stopped dead in the street, and said, 'You're not gone on him, are you?'

A man with a barrow halted behind him, and said, 'Now then, Romeo, hit her in the home, can't you?'

Jane walked on, and Ernest had to trot to catch her up. This was like the pictures, this was Life, Jane thought, high and mighty Ernest trotting after her like a little dog, and making faces like Novarro.

Ernest came up alongside and repeated his question.

'What if I am?' said Jane. 'Let's cross here.' And she darted across in front of a tram.

Ernest had to wait for the tram, and trotted again. 'What if you were?' said he. 'Well, you'd better forget it, that's all.'

'What d'you mean?'

'You'll come to a bad end, that's what I mean. There's only one thing his class wants out of your class, and that's something for nothing—see?'

'What's class got to do with it?'

'Class is class,' said Ernest, 'and you can't get away from it. D'you think he'll marry you, or what?'

'I haven't thought anything about it.' Which was very true.

'Well, if you don't want to be a broken blossom, you'd better not think any more, that's my advice.'

But Ernest's excellent advice had only put new and more fatal notions into her head. She was now considering this marriage idea.

'Isn't our class as good as his class, Ernest?' she said at length.

'Better,' said Ernest shortly, for he always suspected mischief when she quoted his opinions.

'Well, then, why shouldn't our class marry his class?'

'It's oil and vinegar. They don't mix.'

'Well, how are you going to get this brotherhood, if there's no mixing?'

'There's no brotherhood with the *borjwaw*.'

'Well, you said I had a *borjwaw* mentology, or something, didn't you, Ernest?'

'*Sy*-chology,' said Ernest.

'Yes. Well, if I've got a *borjwow* what-is-it, I'd better marry a *borjwaw*, seems to me.'

'All right, try it!' said Ernest, furious, 'and join the army of the exploited! The streets of London are paved with women of the proletariat who put their trust in the master classes——'

'Don't you make speeches at me, Ernest!' said Jane.

'Well, all I know,' said Ernest, abandoning argument, 'if that bloke so much as touches you, I'll put him in the Thames.'

'You'll mind your own business. You're always talking stuff about the independence of the female proletariat, and then the first chance I get of a little independence you turn round and abuse me. That's like you, all over.'

Ernest muttered something about economic pawns and was silent. They had reached the little gate in the fence and were both angry, and Ernest, remembering bitterly that this evening was to be a special treat, cursed Mr. Bryan and all his artists. Inflamed with jealousy and just rage, he seized Jane roughly in his arms.

'Let me go!' she cried, struggling; but, even as she did so, she thought '*Alone with the Adventurer Rose Repels his Dishonourable Advances*'.

He kissed her hotly, saying, 'Sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander—see?' and meaning by the goose the detested Bryan.

She wriggled in his arms and hid her head; then bit his finger and tore herself away. She stood trembling a moment, looking at him. 'You worm!' she said, and slipped through the gate.

But she had scarcely crossed the wharf before she was ashamed of herself. 'I must be a wanton!' she thought, because she had almost enjoyed that struggle. And she

knew she had not treated Ernest fairly, worm though he was.

And so, on Saturday, when Ernest appeared at the Ravens' back-door to ask her out on Sunday, she felt kinder, and said, 'All right, Ernest; only no jawing, and you behave yourself—see?'

It was a great day, that Saturday, the last day of her economic thraldom, and she had to be kind. She felt so kind that she was sorry for Mrs. Raven, who was losing her, and by the evening she was almost of a mind to take her notice back, because she knew the house would be upside down without her, and she did *not* believe that Mrs. Raven was suited yet, though many girls had called. With Mrs. Raven it was a case of many called but few chosen.

But Jane did not intend to be weak any more, for the weak fell out of the film before the first reel was over. And all Saturday, whenever she had to do anything which she much disliked doing, she did it fiercely, saying to herself, 'The last time, the last time!' When the sink was stopped up and she had to put her arm down the drain and ferret about among the tea-leaves, when the cat was sick in a corner of the drawing-room, when Nanny asked her to keep an eye on the children for three minutes and stayed away for thirty, when little Tom poked a stick in Margaret's eye and Mrs. Raven came down and said there was never all this yelling when they were with her, when impatient telephoners refused to give their names, and Mr. Raven said how often had he told her to get everybody's name, when Florry took the last two new potatoes, when Mr. Raven walked in muddy boots across the nursery floor just after she had scrubbed it, she thought always, 'All right, but it's the last time.' Still, it would be strange to have no part in this house and all its daily troubles and excitements, and she did not know how they would manage without her.

It was her pride to be always the one who knew where everything was, whether it was candles, the corkscrew, or Mr. Raven's umbrella: when he had been hunting for one of the four corkscrews for five minutes it gave her pleasure to be able to put her hand upon two of them immediately. So much so that, as Mr. Raven suspected, it was a

temptation to put things away in places where nobody would think of looking for them. Letters left in the dining-room would go behind the books on the first shelf; studs she hid in drawers, and razor-blades in jewel-boxes. To-day she took the corkscrews from her cunning corners and laid them in an obvious drawer with the sensation that she was resigning a kingdom. She was a power in this house, after all, and now she would be a power no more.

But washing-up for the last time put an end to these regrets. Since it was the last time Florry let her do both the washing and drying as well. The Ravens had had two neighbours to supper, and there had been liver and bacon, which meant mustard and grease; and artichokes, which meant oil and vinegar; and strawberries, which, like artichokes, meant remains and mess. Jane thought she had never known such messy washing-up. A thick scum swam upon the surface of the basin, and the mingled fumes of hot oil and bacon-fat and gravy and cabbage filled the little room. One kettle of boiling water was not enough, for she had to change the water three times. She was conscientiously determined to leave a good mark behind her, gave every plate an extra rub, and spent a long time ferreting about in the corners of the milk-jug and the sauce-boat. She fished out the knives one by one instead of by handfuls, as usual, and rubbed them singly, as if they were to be exhibited in a glass-case. Florry sat on her hard Windsor chair and read the evening paper, looking up from time to time to make a pained remark, such as, 'Suppose you'll be laying in late to-morrow morning?' or 'Some people don't know when they're well off.' Jane made no reply, but thought to herself, 'The last time, old sour-face!'

And on Monday she was to sit for Mr. Bryan again. On Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday—all the week, except Saturday. Unless Mr. Bryan had to go away, and as to that, she was to find out on Sunday evening, when he would know. But surely he would not wish to go away; surely he would wish to stay at home and go on with her picture.

She put all the plates on the rack, and all the glasses in the cupboard, and all the knives and forks in the basket.

She cleaned out the sink and took out the grating from the drain and carefully removed the tea-leaves. She rinsed and squeezed the dish-cloths and hung them on the line to dry; she got out the teapot, the cups and saucers, the sugar and the milk, and made the tray ready for the Ravens' evening tea; she filled the kettle and put it on the stove, so that now Florry had nothing to do but light the gas and carry up the tray. Then, conscious of a good work well done, she looked about her and said, 'That's the lot, I think.'

Florry threw one look at the tray and said without gratitude, 'You've forgotten the spoons.'

Jane fetched the teaspoons and in Florry's little room put on her coat and hat. She went upstairs with the idea of saying good-bye to Mrs. Raven, and listened at the drawing-room door. She had somehow looked forward to this farewell: she saw Mrs. Raven grasping her hand and saying, 'Thank you, *thank* you, Jane, for all you have done for this house. How we shall manage without you I *don't* know!' But she could hear Mrs. Raven talking with her guests, and, as it happened, the elder Miss Anstruther was at that moment remarking that nowadays if you gave servants an inch they took an ell. Jane concluded that Mrs. Raven had forgotten her, and she crept downstairs again; which was unjust, for Mrs. Raven came downstairs a few minutes later to say good-bye to Jane and found that she had gone.

The farewell to Florry was disappointing too, for Florry only said, 'Well, au revore; you'll be glad to come back in a week or two, I dare say.'

It was like Florry to make her feel guilty in her moment of triumph, and when for the last time she slammed the front door behind her Jane felt more guilty than triumphant. This was the first grand turning-point in her existence; the New Life was spread before her; she had improved her 'stattus', thrown off her bondage; and no one encouraged her—not even Ernest. And now she was wondering whether Florry would remember to do Mr. Raven's tennis-shoes in the morning.

But suddenly it flashed upon her that she, Jane, would not be there in the morning; and, flinging Mr. Raven and

his tennis-shoes behind her, she ran as fast as she could to the beloved *Blackbird.*

The entertainment which Ernest had in store for her the following afternoon turned out to be a Monster Demonstration and Mass Rally in Hyde Park in support of the 'Hands Off Croatia' Movement. To do him justice, he had proposed to take her to Hampton Court and see the Maze, but on Saturday evening he had received an invitation to speak from Platform 2, and he thought that the Mass Rally would be good for Jane.

So Jane found herself marching along the Victoria Embankment in column of fours. Ernest was on one side of her, and on the other an envenomed old lady with a wrinkled face, who as she marched muttered maledictions on the Conservative Government. Not far in front of them was a banner, and not far behind them was a brass band. On the banner was written:

WORKERS OF BRITAIN
STAND SOLID
FOR YOUR
CROATIAN BROTHERS

And Jane could see other banners, some gaily coloured, tossing and fluttering at intervals in the long column far ahead of her. She had never been in a procession before; she had never walked about London in the road and had the traffic stopped for her; she had never marched to the music of a band, and though it was a puzzle to know how to walk in time, with one band behind and another just in front, she enjoyed it. Also she enjoyed seeing ordinary people clustered on the pavement and staring at her curiously as if she were something in the Lord Mayor's Show. The banners and the music and the marching excited her; they seemed to fit in with the grand new independence which she had just put on, they spoke of hope and determination and better things; she began to think that there must be something fine in the 'Hands Off Croatia' Movement, and she wondered where Croatia was, and who was laying hands on Croatia, and why.

She did not like to ask Ernest, who had turned suddenly silent, because he was getting his speech by heart. The

lady on Jane's right was busily discharging information, certainly, but it seemed to have little to do with Croatia. Jane gathered that for the old lady the demonstration was demonstrating not so much affection for the unfortunate Croatians, whoever they were, but detestation for the British Government.

The band behind them stopped playing for a space and Jane heard her neighbour cry, 'Forgers! Blackguards!' in tones of great bitterness. 'A nice thing!' she cried to no one in particular. 'The Home Secretary a forger! They put my uncle in prison,' she added, and marched on mutely with that thought for a few paces. 'Fifty millions to persecute the Jews!' she continued, then: 'Churchill was in it! And they talk about Parnell! *Parnell indeed!*' she shrieked, turning her leathery old face to Jane. 'What about the Hackney election?'

Jane did not clearly understand these observations, so she said politely, 'What exactly are they doing to Croatia?' for she felt that a person with so many grievances would be acquainted with the Croatians' troubles. But fortunately, as she spoke, the brass band behind them blared out afresh, and her shameful ignorance was drowned in the music of the 'International.'

The old lady, however, perceiving that she had been addressed, paused in her stride, nodded delightedly, and putting her hands to her mouth, shouted in Jane's ear, 'That's right! You'll do! You're the sort we want!'

Jane paused also to receive this message, the man behind her trod on her heel, and the marchers were thrown into confusion as far back as the band. Jane blushed, Ernest looked crossly at her, and she decided that she would not ask for information again.

By Trafalgar Square the novelty of the procession had worn off, and Jane began to feel tired. Her thoughts turned from the ill-treated Croatians to her dear Mr Bryan; she hoped the Mass Rally would not last too long for Mr. Bryan had said that he would be out after six, and if she could not call at the studio she would have to telephone, and the telephone was expensive and alarming.

They marched along Piccadilly, where Ernest made remarks about the gentlemen's clubs, and hinted that one

day these buildings would be put to better uses. Jane had never walked so far in her life, her feet were burning and her legs ached. But as they swung into the Park between the waiting lines of motor-cars and omnibuses every band played at once, every banner was raised another inch or two, and every back was straightened; and Jane, padding painfully at last over the yellow grass, was touched again by the excitement of the march and worried no longer about the whereabouts of Croatia.

The next thing was that she was wedged in the third row in front of Platform Number 2 and smiling up at Ernest, who was smiling down at her kindly from the platform. It was hot, the supporters of Croatia were hot, they smelt strongly of humanity and smoked very strong tobacco; yet Jane was glad to stand still at last and have something to lean against, if it was only a hot Socialist.

The first speaker began, 'Comrades, you know me,' and went on to say that he had been in prison. This announcement was received with loud cheers. This speaker did not speak for long, and said nothing at all about Croatia, though he mentioned his objections to our Capitalist Government. It was his business to introduce Comrade Watkins, who had not only been in prison, but had only just come out of prison. Comrade Watkins then stood up, the envenomed old lady said, 'Bravo! Watty,' there was more applause, and Jane began to feel a little ashamed that she had never been in prison.

Comrade Watkins was a small, dark, chubby man with burning eyes and a high voice. He looked very well after prison, and much better fed than most of his audience. He had the practised orator's trick of breaking up his opening sentences into small sections, with great pauses between them, which made the audience feel that the section next to come would be of profound significance. This trick he had learned from the Earl of Derby at a meeting of the Liverpool Conservative Women's Association many years before, when Comrade Watkins was a stage-hand. He began:

'As you 'ave 'eard—
I 'ave enjoyed—
The 'ospitality—

Of 'Is Majesty's Government. (Great laughter.)
I 'arbour no ill-will—
Against 'Is Majesty's Government—
They did me proud—(Laughter.)
They 'ave my gratitude—(Laughter.)
They 'ave my prayers—(Great laughter.)
For what are my sufferin's, comrades——? '

No one seemed to know what his sufferings were, and, indeed, he was one of the very few persons present who had already had two good meals that day. He raised his voice: '*What* are my sufferin's, after all—when weighed in the balance—against the solidarity—of the toiling masses? ' (Approving sounds.) 'But let me tell you *this*, my friends.' Comrade Watkins paused again, and, turning his head from side to side, glared fiercely about Hyde Park, as if to challenge any man to prevent the speaker from telling him this. No one, however, offering any objection to his telling them this, he said: 'Let me say *this*, comrades,' and paused again. 'That my sufferin's —and my incarceration—is only one more nail—in the coffin—the *coffin*—of 'Is Majesty's Government.' (Loud and prolonged applause.)

Comrade Watkins had now warmed his audience, he had stamped his personality upon their tender minds, and he gathered speed.

'Comrades,' he said, 'I am not going to come any 'umbug over you, I am not going to use the language of chicanery and hyperbowl at this great meeting this afternoon, but I say without fear of contradiction that the behaviour of the Government in the West 'Am controversy 'as been a scandal and a dudgeon to the public life of the country.'

Here he stopped suddenly and looked about, as if expecting support, and many of the loyal comrades again made encouraging sounds; but Jane began to weary of Comrade Watkins. She did not know what a dudgeon was, and she could summon up no resentment about the incarceration of Comrade Watkins; but she found herself painfully nervous about Ernest's speech and astonishingly anxious that he should speak better than Comrade Watkins. The infectious fever of politics had caught her, and she

was still hoping to hear from somebody the geographical position of the Croatians, the details of their wrongs, and the measures by which it was proposed to alleviate them.

But Comrade Watkins had other fish to fry. When he had done with the West Ham controversy he passed on to the Education scandal, and from that to the conduct of the police at Huddersfield, and from that to the barbarous character of the Home Secretary, the bungling of the expedition to the Dardanelles, the persecution of the Jews in Roumania, the rent of municipal houses, the price of beans, the aspirations of the subject races, and an outrageous observation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the third reading of the Finance Bill. Over the whole field of human affairs Comrade Watkins ranged easily and ferociously, never at a loss for a word; and almost the only subject on which he did not touch was the menace to Croatia. He gesticulated often, and his face glistened with sweat. When Jane looked up at him, the bright sun behind him dazzled her eyes, and when she looked down she felt rude. Also, she was much afraid that if she stood for very long in that crowd she would faint. And the thought of fainting reminded her of Mr. Bryan and the importance of escaping from the Mass Rally in good time to call at the studio, and she became less and less interested in the remarks of Comrade Watkins. She peered about her among the crowd, and thought that most of those near her seemed nice, quiet, sensible men like Fred, and she wondered why they listened so attentively to the remarks of Mr. Watkins, which seemed to her to have no sense at all. Then, in an eloquent aside upon the vices of the rich, the speaker said, '*I've* seen the fine ladies walking like peacocks down Rotten Row . . .' and far back, upon the outskirts of the crowd, among the holiday-makers who had drifted to the scene, a voice said innocently, 'You mean pea-hens!' Many laughed, but the nice, quiet, sensible men about Jane flared up instantly, and, turning their heads, cried furiously, 'Chuck him out!' and 'Wring his bloody neck!' So angry were they that Jane's affectionate mind went with them, and she found herself resenting bitterly that flippant interruption. So excited was the orator that he took off his coat, and,

gesticulating more freely, demolished in a phrase or two the capitalist law courts, and the House of Lords. He was now so hot that Jane became fascinated by the drops of sweat which trickled down his nose and trembled at the end until some passionate gesture shook them off upon the chairman or the turf below him.

With the gesture which destroyed for ever the pretensions of the League of Nations, a sort of shower descended upon the parched and possibly grateful Park. Comrade Watkins then took his collar off, and having handed his collar and studs to the chairman, began to march up and down the platform as he spoke. But after the pea-hen interruption he never had the same firm grip of his audience, and presently the chairman tugged delicately at the seat of his trousers, and Comrade Watkins sat down. When he sat down he left very few of the institutions of the British Empire standing, but Jane was no wiser about Croatia than before.

Ernest had never been in prison, so when he was called upon there was no applause. Jane's heart beat strongly for him, and she felt that if any one interrupted she would die. But very soon she was at ease, and proud of him. She was surprised by the strange voice in which he spoke, a voice which she had never heard before. But it was a fine, brave, confident voice, and it pleased her that he went straight to the matter of Croatia, about which they were all there to demonstrate. It seemed that the Capitalist Governments of Europe were not keeping their hands off Jane's comrades in Croatia. In fact, there was a plot against the innocent Croats, and Ernest proved this by a brief account of the conduct of the European Governments in China. Croatia was being encircled, isolated, she was a pawn in the economic machinations of Wall Street. Mr. Churchill, as usual, was in the plot, and with him, on this occasion, were Mr. Baldwin and the steel kings. Ernest was a good speaker; he spoke easily and quietly and sincerely. Jane felt that whatever it was that he meant, he meant it, that there was in his heart a real brotherly pain for the far-off people to whom somebody was doing these horrible things. And Jane, moved at last, tried to picture in her mind what manner of folk these Croatians

were. She wondered if they were black. She saw them as a thin, black, stunted race, living in mud huts, surrounded by snow, and probably wolves. They had numerous babies which were kept in baskets, like litters of puppies, and owing to the behaviour of Mr. Churchill these babies were not getting quite enough milk. But Ernest had plunged into an historical argument and Jane did her best to follow him, amazed by his knowledge. The Treaty of Brest, the Brussels Agreement—Treaties fell from Ernest like ripe plums. 'What *is* the Polish Corridor?' he asked. No one knew what the Polish Corridor was, and nothing that Ernest said afterwards enlightened them; but for a long time afterwards the Polish Corridor remained in Jane's mind as a mark and example of Ernest's high qualities.

But Ernest, like the other speaker, and like all the speakers who have ever spoken, went on too long; and Jane, though she admired him still, grew less and less interested in the suffering Croatians. And as her mind wandered from Croatia, her bodily discomfort claimed her attention. From peering up at Ernest her eyes ached and her neck was stiff, she felt limp and flabby, and thought that she recognized the first approaches of the faint. She reasoned carefully with herself whether it would be more upsetting to Ernest to go away while Ernest was still speaking, or to fall flop under Ernest's nose. She decided to retire quickly, if she could, and hoped that Ernest would not notice. So when Ernest was answering a question about the Polish Corridor she turned round and pushed gently, saying, 'Let me out, please.' The men saw her pale face, and made way for her kindly. On the edge of the crowd she turned her head and glanced guiltily at Ernest. Ernest, still talking, had reproachful eyes upon her, for he did not see that her face was pale, but only that she had gone away, and by her going distracted his audience. She saw that she had done a dreadful thing, but sat down on the grass and felt better away from the stuffy crowd. One of the picnic-parties who hovered on the fringe, enjoying the fun but comparatively indifferent to the future of Croatia, gave her a drink of milk from a flask. She asked them the time and they said half-past

five. A small panic seized her, for now she would have to telephone to Mr. Bryan, and she could not even telephone until the Mass Rally was over. For one thing, she had no pennies. From where she sat she could see Ernest still speaking, but could not hear a word he said, which was strange but restful. She thought he looked rather fine and handsome on the platform in his blue suit, with his eager expression, his curly forelock, and waving arms; and she was proud to see all those people paying attention to what he said. Perhaps after all there was more sense in what he said than she had thought. But she prayed that he would stop saying it very soon, and very soon he did.

Then Comrade Councillor Groves of Stepney moved the resolution, which was a very long resolution indeed and began: 'That this meeting, assembled under the auspices of the Joint National Council of the Anglo-Croatian Workers' Committee, and the Executive Committee of the "Hands Off Croatia" Movement, records its detestation of the policy of the Government towards the economic encirclement and industrial serfdom of Croatia, Ruthenia, Lithuania, and the sub-Baltic States, and which by sabotaging the international solidarity of the workers it is the aim of the present Capitalist Government to do, and this meeting determines to by every legitimate means resist, etc., etc., and which, etc., etc. . . .

Councillor Groves spoke to the resolution for five minutes, and Comrade Ladder seconded it for seven. Jane was sure that by now it was ten minutes to six, and was in an agony about her telephone-call, which every minute grew more terribly important. She disliked Comrade Ladder, and did not care what injury was done to the Croatians. She wanted to telephone to Mr. Bryan and to hear his voice. Ernest sat on the platform still, smiling up at Comrade Ladder and never once looking in her direction. She might be dead for all he cared. And she thought it strange that one who could be so large-hearted towards the remote Croatians (perfect strangers) could be completely selfish towards his best girl. But the whole thing was strange. All these simple Freds, these railwaymen and plumbers and out-of-works, they had their own troubles and their own girls, no doubt; and what were

they all doing, wasting a fine Sunday afternoon on the Polish Corridor and the troubles of the Croatians whom they had never seen? She suspected that somewhere in it there must be something that was sensible and good, for it seemed so very unselfish. But why did not Ernest come and take her to the telephone?

The 'Red Flag' was sung and Jane stood up at the edge of the audience. She did not know the words of the song, and no one about her seemed to know them except one small boy who sang them very lustily and clearly. Jane, thinking that she owed this to Ernest, followed the boy in a confidential treble a few words behind. At about 'Chicago swells the listening throng' she saw that Ernest was standing beside her, silent and scowling, and she sang more devoutly than before.

After the last fraternal chord Ernest said, 'Well, you're a nice one! Couldn't you wait a minute?'

'I was done up, Ernest. Ready to faint. It was so hot in there. You spoke very nicely, Ernest. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.'

'Well, you distracted 'em,' said Ernest.

But seeing him a little mollified she said quickly, 'I've got to telephone, Ernest. Where do I go?'

'Telephone? Who to?'

'Business, Ernest. It's one of my engagements. And I'm late as it is.'

'Well, what's the hurry?' said Ernest, standing stock-still.

'The gentleman's going out after six, you see'—and she knew at once that she had used a fatal word.

'Gentleman, eh?' sneered Ernest. 'This Bryan, I suppose?'

'Well, it's none of your business,' said Jane, grown bold with desperation. 'I told you no jawing. And if you won't take me, I'll go by myself—see?'

But having no pennies she knew that she was in a weak position; so she took hold of his arm and led him vaguely away towards Kensington.

'Marble Arch Station,' he said sourly, and they walked in that direction, not saying a word.

When they came to the station and he had given her the pennies, she said, 'Would you like to take a walk while I

telephone, Ernest ? ' for she saw that Ernest would be an embarrassment.

' No, thank you,' said Ernest shortly. ' I'll stay here and look after you.'

All four telephone boxes were occupied, and outside three of them were people waiting. Jane and Ernest encamped outside the fourth box, and stared through the glass into the little cabinets which had heard so many beating hearts, so many lies and loving words and sorrows. In the first box was a commercial traveller explaining to his wife at Guildford why he had missed the midnight train and the morning train as well ; in the second box a young bachelor was inviting a young actress to accompany him to Maidenhead ; in the third box the daughter of wealthy parents was pouring out her heart to a young literary man of whom those parents disapproved. And in the fourth a married woman was saying good-bye to the third officer of a liner about to sail for China.

This woman had only just entered the box and seemed to have all time at her disposal. She dropped her bag once or twice and picked it up with maddening deliberation, she read the printed instructions twice, and then, after searching in her bag, came out and asked Ernest if he could change sixpence. She was given a wrong number, and suffered this with patience ; and when at last she heard her officer's voice, fitted her elbow into a corner, and, leaning against the side of the cabinet, settled herself as if for sleep. Jane watched impatiently her moving lips and nodding head. From time to time she turned her sad eyes and rested them on Jane and looked right through her, lost in her own romantic sorrow. Jane had no pity for her sorrow, nor she for Jane's anxiety, and Ernest was bitter against them both. Yet these three persons had met together that afternoon to record their brotherhood with an unknown people on the farther side of Europe.

' D'you know the number ? ' said Ernest suddenly.

' No,' said Jane, feeling foolish.

' What's the name ? ' said Ernest, picking up the book.

' Bryan,' said Jane boldly, but blushed and felt guilty, and was furious with Ernest for making her feel guilty.

Ernest found the number, and they glared again at the

unfortunate woman, who was asking the officer if he really loved her. At last she put down the receiver and stared at it for a moment or two as if it were her lover's vessel disappearing round a headland. Jane tapped her foot, and Ernest said sarcastically, 'Don't hurry, my girl, there's no one waiting.' For other people's love-affairs are generally foolish. But when she came out she said she was sorry with so sweet a smile that Jane was instantly her friend. The box smelt of disinfectant, cigar-smoke. and the woman's scent. Ernest proposed to come into the box with her, but Jane said she could manage, thank you. But she had only once used the telephone before, and she read the directions very quickly twice—quickly because she could see by the clock that it was five minutes past six, and twice because she was in such a confusion of mind that the words meant nothing to her. She took off the receiver and listened, trembling; her heart beat more wildly far than it had beaten for Ernest's speech. She could not have said why, but the moment seemed tremendous; she felt fear and excitement and great expectation, but knew not what she expected, except that she would hear the voice of Mr. Bryan, who had held her in his arms and kissed her, that warm companionable voice which thrilled her.

A cool voice said startlingly, 'Number, please?' and, stammering, she gave the number. Nothing happened. Eight minutes past! Perhaps he had gone out. She could not imagine a more terrible blow. She was late, she had failed him; and all through Ernest and his stupid Croatians. She peeped sidelong through the glass to her left and saw the young girl, her face mournful and tender, still whispering to her lover. She peeped sidelong through the glass to her right and saw the cold little eyes of Ernest fixed jealously upon her. She wondered if all that she felt was in her face, and wished that he had the decency to keep away. The lady who had telephoned before her opened the door and said, 'Sorry, I left my bag.' A voice said wearily, '*Two* pennies, please.' She put one penny in the slot, dropped another, picked up the lady's hand-bag, smiled at the lady, pulled the door to, stole a fearful glance at Ernest, slid in the other penny, and at last, breathless with agitation, heard a voice say, 'Hullo!'

Mr. Bryan's voice!

She gabbled in her nervousness, 'It's me, Jane Bell, shall I come to-morrow, please, Mr. Bryan?' She felt as if she had run a mile.

'Who?' he said, mystified.

'Me. Jane. Jane Bell, Mr. Bryan.'

'Oh, *you*!' he said in a tone of great surprise. But was he not expecting to hear from her, then? She had imagined him, she realized now, sitting waiting for a bell to ring, looking anxiously at the clock.

'Yes,' she said. 'Shall I come to-morrow, Mr. Bryan?'

'No. Look here,' said the voice, so strange and distant. 'I shall be away this week, and when I come back I'm going abroad, so I shan't be in London till the spring, I'm afraid. See you then, perhaps.'

Jane had read about hearts standing still, and she thought that her's had halted now. She put a hand to her heart. But all she could say was, 'Yes, Mr. Bryan.'

'Good-bye, then,' said the voice cheerily. 'Oh, hullo! You got those introductions?'

'Yes, thank you, Mr. Bryan.'

'That's good. You'll get plenty of work. Good-bye.'

There was a sort of click, and then silence. Jane kept her mouth to the transmitter, and her ear to the receiver, and at last she said timidly, humbly, without hope, and almost in a whisper, the ridiculous, the tragic, and the inadequate word, 'Hullo?'

There was no answer. Slowly, unwillingly, as if there still might come from it some kindlier sound, she returned the receiver to its little bracket, and stood staring at the instrument as that other woman had done. She had forgotten Ernest, she had forgotten that others might be waiting for the box. This was the end of her expectations, the sudden grave of Love's Bliss, this horrid smelly little box of silence. She stood staring at the neat inhuman machine until Ernest rapped on the glass beside her. Then she said, 'Pull yourself together, Jane Bell,' and went out.

'Funny sort of "business", wasn't it?' said Ernest, but not unkindly, for he saw that she had 'taken a knock' and was glad of it, but did not wish to rub it in. 'Did you speak to your "gentleman"?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Anything the matter?'

'Oh, no,' said Jane coolly. 'He don't want to draw me this week, that's all.'

'Like a walk in the Park?'

'No, thank you, Ernest. I'd sooner go home.'

All the way home in the bus she said nothing at all, but went over and over in her mind those hateful seconds on the telephone. It was bad enough that Mr. Bryan was going away, as it seemed to her, for ever; but that this should mean nothing to him! For it must mean nothing. Or why was his voice so cheerful and commonplace? It had made her feel like his servant again. But surely she had been more than his servant in the studio? Was this the same man who had held her in his arms and kissed her reverently, in the Fairbanks manner? Had that meant nothing? Perhaps she had spoken stupidly on the telephone, and annoyed him; she repeated endlessly every word she had said, but what had she said, after all? 'It's me, Mr. Bryan. Shall I come to-morrow?' There could be nothing very wrong in that. She put the chief blame on Ernest and his Croatians, for they had prevented her from calling at the studio. Then at least she would have seen him face to face and had a proper good-bye perhaps, instead of that perplexing telephone affair. Then she would have known whether he really liked her or not. Perhaps she might call at the studio in the morning. But for what excuse? What could she say? If she did that, perhaps he might snub her properly. She felt snubbed already. No, the best thing to do was to forget about him. These artists were flighty ones, Ernest had said, and probably Ernest was right as usual.

Anyhow, she was not going to show anything. She thought: '*Jane with the Anguish of a Woman Slighted in Her Heart Carries a Smile on Her Lips.*'

For May Merlin had done that in 'Disillusion'. And she said airily (she hoped), 'It's a nuisance, Ernest. I'll have to look for another job this week.'

But Ernest was not deceived. 'Class is class,' he said, 'and you can't get away from it.'

XI

UP THE 'CUT'

ON the next morning, Monday, the *Prudence* and the *Adventure* tied up in the creek, and Fred called on the *Blackbird*. Mr. Bell had taken Lily to see a Government man about the milliner's job, and Jane was alone, washing-up and thinking that it was better to wash up her own things than other people's, but wishing nevertheless that they were Mr. Bryan's.

Fred said, 'There's a nice breeze, Jenny. Like to go out in the boat?'

He did not say that he wanted her to show off her nautical accomplishments before his father, but she guessed it. She was feeling sore and inferior from the day before, and the arrival of the adoring Fred comforted her. She said, 'All right, Fred,' and got out the ancient sail.

Fred did not offer to help, but watched admiringly her quick, small fingers at work with sail and halyard and cleat. The sail was grubby and had holes in it, the tack-lashing was not Manilla, but a piece of strong string doubled, the rudder was held together with nails and string, and the sheet looked like a length of blind-cord; but the sail was set as well as any mortal could have set it. Fred wished that his father could have seen Jane throw her small weight on the halyard, for this would certainly have satisfied him that she was a fit wife for a boatman on the Grand Union Canal.

The breeze blew smartly from the north-west, the tide was making up, and the sun shone warmly out of a cloudy sky. Old Mr. Green sat in the garden of the 'Pigeons' with his pipe, waiting, as he had promised Fred, to see the fine watermanship of Fred's girl. But Jane, perversely, chose to beat up-river, in the wrong direction. Chiswick Church and Chiswick Mall, behind the rich untidy green of the island, was like a country village in the hazy morning

light; and Jane, after a long look, said, 'Pretty, isn't it?', meaning by that that she thought it very beautiful.

Fred was not interested in Nature at that moment, but was thinking that his father would not be favourably impressed by a distant view of Jane and Fred disappearing up the river. So he said dishonestly, 'Let's run down a bit. Mother said she'd like to see you again'—though Mother had never so much as mentioned Jane.

Jane said, 'There's no hurry, Fred,' and to tease him sailed on for two or three tacks; and Fred, though in a fever of anxiety, did not dare to state openly that this was the day appointed for the entrance examination for the Grand Union Canal. But at the top of the island Jane put the tiller over and let the sheet slip through her hand, and they ran down swiftly against the tide, the narrow boat rolling in the gusty breeze and churning up a noisy wave at the bows. Fred peered anxiously ahead towards the 'Pigeons', and at last, having discovered the familiar curves of Mr. Green, said in great astonishment, 'There's father at the "Pigeons"!'

Jane smiled gravely at him, and said, 'Well, what a surprise!' but she waved her hand to Mr. Green as they foamed past the 'Pigeons'. Mr. Green took his pipe out of his mouth, and held up his tankard of old and mild. Just then, luckily for Fred, Jane saw to starboard a great quantity of driftwood bobbing westward on the tide. She cried eagerly, 'Oh, firewood!' and putting the tiller over, jibed suddenly, so that the boom swung across and swept Fred's felt hat into the river, at which Mr. Green laughed long and loudly.

But Jane, ignoring Fred's felt hat, had hauled in her sheet, and was bearing down delightedly upon a drifting plank; for many of the inhabitants of Hammersmith, and especially those humbler ones who dwelt in boats, depended very much for their fuel upon the chance flotsam of the river. For the most part this was collected laboriously, a bit here and a bit there; but sometimes the tide, and especially, it was said, for some mysterious reason, a spring tide, would send up from the docks a great cloud of wood. And then, as when the Cornish fishermen see suddenly the small fry leap in terror from the sea, and knowing that the

mackerel are at hand, cry 'There she goes!', and in haste put out their boats, so did the provident and poor of Hammersmith cry 'Wood!', set out in small boats, and gather in the harvest.

Such a cloud of desirable wood was it which had attracted Jane. There were long white planks fresh from the saw-mill, seasoned old fragments, the scourings of wharves, fine-shaped wedges to split them with, and innumerable sticks for kindling, baskets and bits of barrels, fragments of broken furniture, old brooms and packing-cases and branches of trees, seasoned wood, tarred wood, greasy wood, muddy wood, but all excellent for burning. Most people went 'wooding' in rowing-boats, but Jane had invented and perfected the new sport of 'wooding' under sail, which had its own rules and observances, and was like some sort of tent-pegging by water. She flashed past the tarry plank which had first taken her fancy, and, taking the sheet and tiller in one small hand, with the other she seized and dragged aboard the prize. No mean feat for a girl, thought Fred, with the sheet pulling like a horse, and the boat travelling fast; but it was a point of honour with Jane to keep the sail full and never slacken speed, except for a piece of wood suspected of hidden nails. Now she went about smartly, made for Fred's hat on the other tack, and brought off a great right and left, the hat to starboard and the head of an old broom to port.

From the garden of the 'Pigeons' Mr. Green applauded this performance with a throaty cheer. Fred flushed with pride, and Jane, pleased herself, began to show off. There was no doubt that she could handle a boat. The battered, leaking, ill-found vessel of the Bells' became a lively, intelligent creature in her hands; she could do anything with it, and moved swiftly back and forth among the drifting harvest, turning, twisting, and swooping like a sea-gull ranging for fish. Fred's proud heart swelled and he glanced often towards the 'Pigeons' to be sure that his father was missing nothing. But at last Jane tore her finger on a nail, and Fred, solicitous, said, 'That's enough, Jenny.' They took back to the *Blackbird* two winter weeks' supply of fuel, and left it on the deck to dry.

Fred went anxiously to the 'Pigeons' and found that

Jane had passed the preliminary examination with flying colours. 'She can handle a boat, cert'n'ly, lad,' said Tom Green. 'We'll take her up the "Cut".'

So Fred returned, and shyly made the official invitation; and Jane accepted it, for now that Mr. Bryan did not want her this week it was comforting to find that somebody wanted her.

They started the next morning, and on Tuesday night Jane slept in a very small bed with Mrs. Green, which she did not much enjoy. But the day had been thrilling, and, drugged with air, she slept well. At Brentford, opposite Kew Gardens, where they left the tideway and entered the canal, they passed into another world, peopled by another race. The narrow opening stretch between the river and the principal lock at Brentford High Street was crowded with barges lying on both sides under the warehouses, loading, unloading, or waiting for freight. The air was full of shouts and sacks of flour and the rattle of cranes, and the ribald cries of the warehousemen. The barge-folk gave them a quieter greeting. Every one seemed to know the Greens; the men threw them a friendly word and the women as a rule said a soft 'Good morning' or nodded gravely without speaking. Jane blushed all the way to Brentford, for every one looked curiously at her, and she felt a stranger in a strange land. There were no lewd cries or whistles from the boatmen, though she suspected, rightly, that many of the strange sounds among the warehouse workers were in the nature of comment upon her face and figure. It was the women of the barges who frightened her, the queens of these little kingdoms, dark-eyed, gipsy-looking, weatherworn creatures, with shawls over their heads and children crawling about their feet, who stood at the doors of their cabins as they have stood for generations, patiently waiting for the next move onward in their wandering existence. The smoke of their domestic hearths went up from the little chimney before their faces, their babies crawled on the deck beside the chimney, tethered with string and next door to the inevitable lark in its cage; their elder children clambered among the cargo and all about the narrow vessel which was their home and nursery and school and playground; their only neighbours were the people of

the barge which happened for the time being to be tied up beside them ; the tiny cabin before them, a few feet square, and not high enough to stand in, held all their worldly goods, their kitchens, their romances, their bridal-beds, their husbands and babies, their past and present and all their future. Most of them, as Jane knew, had never known a different sort of home, had never slept under a different roof ; and here all their lives they would labour and love and bear their children. And there was something in their dignified, enduring eyes which seemed to say to Jane, ' Who are you to come among us, and how do you hope, weak girl, to live as we do ? '

But once away from the disturbing eyes and confusion of Brentford, she felt happy. The canal plunged suddenly into the rustic solitudes to the south of Ealing. For a mile or so there were fields and green trees all about. Through the trees there was seen frequently a scurrying of District trains, but at the next lock a heron rose from the towing-path and flapped royally away. The horse Beauty marched steadily along the towing-path, his nose in his dinner, not hurrying himself ; and beside him walked Mr. Green, sometimes encouraging the feeding Beauty with a cry, sometimes stopping to pick an early blackberry or wild flower in the hedge, sometimes whistling, but for the most part reflecting on life, and wondering if Fred's girl would turn out a good one. And behind Beauty stole silently the two laden barges—or rather boats. For, as Fred very soon explained, these narrow canal craft are not barges, nor are their crews bargemen nor watermen, but boatmen, and watermen are those who work the wider barges of the tideway. The *Adventure* came first, the *Prudence* followed after. Their motion was as gentle as the coming of sleep ; their blunt, round prows did not divide the water, but caress it ; there was no sound but the ripple along the shore and the slow clip-clop of Beauty's feet, and these sounds said ' Peace ', and brought peace to Jane's soul.

Mrs. Green and Arthur were in the *Adventure*. Mrs. Green, like most of the older boatwomen, was dressed in black—a long black dress down to her ankles, black stockings, and thick black boots like a man's. She wore at her throat a large photograph of Mr. Green in a brooch, and

from her ears dangled large ear-rings of green glass. Her hair was bound tightly across the top and round the back of her head in six or seven thin plaits; and this gave her from behind an air of youth and skittishness which was startlingly denied when she turned her sharp face.

Now she turned often and gazed grimly back at the *Prudence*, where Jane was steering with Fred at her side. Fred wore an old cloth cap and a tie, but no collar. Steering the long craft was not so easy as it looked, and Fred, as anxious and as proud as a mother, showed her all the little tricks, and bubbled over with advice and commendation.

'You've got a lot more to say up here, Fred,' said Jane, surprised. 'Quite found your tongue, haven't you?'

'I'm on my element, you see,' said Fred. 'Swing her round now, Jenny. That's the girl'; and as they slid into the cool darkness under the railway bridge he took a quick look ahead at his father and mother, slipped his arm round her shoulders, and kissed her soft cheek.

'I'm glad you came, my little Jenny,' he whispered.

'So am I, Fred,' said Jane truthfully, pleased by this abandoned action; but she thought of Mr. Bryan.

They met two power-boats, newly painted, and Fred explained about the Castles and the Roses. The canal craft, like their women-folk, were individual and different from other craft. They were long and narrow, to fit the locks, and with their gay colours and elaborate decorations they too seemed to say that they were of the gipsy breed. They were painted, every one, in the ancient traditional style of the canal, handed down by generations of boatmen. 'Castles', 'hearts', and 'roses' were the three indispensable themes of the decoration—roses for beauty, hearts for romance, and castles, maybe, for worldly honour. On the flanks of every cabin was a different castle, a wild and foreign-looking castle on a hill-top, a castle out of a fairy-book; but this turned out, upon enquiry, to be a romantic study of some real English castle not far removed from the canal; and somewhere, sure enough, in a corner would be a romantic stream disappearing under a bridge, which was the artist's attempt to express the Grand Union Canal in terms as noble as the castle. Forward on the hatch-cover

would be a large, red, flaming heart on a field of white, the shield and forehead of the boat. Then in the cabin, which was all panelled with grained wood, were smalle castles and smaller hearts and panels of diamonds and clusters of roses, in brilliant reds and yellows and greens; and every domestic vessel—the great water-can on the deck, the biscuit-tin on the shelf—had its roses. Just inside every door on the left-hand side, in exactly the same place, were fixed a few shining brass knobs and bosses, like the ornaments of bedsteads and cart-horses; and, highly polished, they made a brave show. Some cabins had only two or three brass knobs, and some a dozen; at holidays, when times were good, the lady of the boat would buy another brass ornament or two, and by the number of brass ornaments the knowing might know if the family were prospering steadily or not.

Old Mrs. Green had seventeen brass knobs, and when the sun shone in through the door the cabin was dazzling. Beyond the brass knobs was the tiny stove, polished and speckless. On the stove stood always a vase of wild flowers, plucked from the hedges by Mr. Green as he stumped along with Beauty; and on each side of the stove were hung festoons of ornamental plates—fine decorated plates with gilded edges or filigree borders, and pretty pictures of Victorian ladies or dancing shepherdesses, and in great gold lettering, 'A Present from Bombay' or 'Banbury Cross'. A glittering brass culinder was over the stove, and among the plates were hung little brass ornaments—a tiny brass anchor, a candlestick, a cannon, and a big brass spoon. Over the small hanging lamp was a burnished shield which shone like the sun. Beyond was a cupboard which had a castle on the door, and was fringed with framed photographs of Mr. Green as a young man and Fred as a baby, and Mrs. Green's mother on the beach at Blackpool. Opposite the stove was a low chest or locker which served as a seat; then came a curtain, draped back during the day, and hung with more photographs, and behind it the bed. The bed let down out of the wall, and nothing was to be seen of it by day but a panel and a castle, and in the bed-space were kept a small trunk and a broken gramophone. Not one inch in this Lilliputian

home was wasted for service, yet every inch was a decoration. To the stranger peeping in from the lock-side it seemed no more than a kennel, a dolls' house, but if he sat inside for a few minutes it seemed to expand; there was so much to see in it that the wandering eye enlarged its tiny measurements and saw it as the Green family saw it. And certainly there was many a great drawing-room or artful Chelsea bedroom which had less of the look of a comfortable home.

The tiller and the rudder were gaily painted too, and round each of them a length of thin line was twisted in that complex ornamental knot which watermen call a Turk's head. Whenever the boats came to rest for a day Mrs. Green scrubbed and pipeclayed the Turks' heads, so that the strands were snow-white. From the rudder-head a plume of horsehair streamed astern. On the deck a spare rope lay religiously coiled and flat. The Greens kept no song-birds.

Everything about their boats was tidy and clean and proudly cared for. Soon Jane saw other boats which had lost their spirits; their Turks' heads were dingy, and their brass knobs lustreless, and she became a partner in the pride of the Greens, and determined that in future the *Blackbird* should be clean and bright and tidy like the *Adventure*.

Approaching the next lock Fred gave her her first lesson in the mysteries of locks. It was a precise and delicate ritual in which every member of the family had his proper part. The lock was open and ready for them. The horse Beauty strained and stumbled up the steep incline of gravel, and, halting at a shout from Mr. Green, went on with his dinner. Mr. Green lifted the glistening tow-rope over the rails of the lock-gate, and taking a turn with it round a fat bollard of oak, tapered down to the shape of a top by the pressure of countless ropes, checked and stopped the *Adventure* against the left-hand wall. Meanwhile Mrs. Green had cast off the tow-rope of the *Prudence*, and Fred steered her in alongside the *Adventure*. Just before the gate he slipped ashore at the mossy steps cut in the wall, and, running up, checked her with the stern-rope. Arthur, on the other side, was already thrusting with his back against the great beam of the gate to close it. Fred did

the same on the right. Then each took from his belt the shining iron 'windlass' or handle which every boatman carries, and went quickly to the far end to raise the 'paddles' and fill the lock. Before the gates were fully closed Mr. Green was at work on one of the paddles, and a great spout of silver water gushed in before the *Adventure's* bows. Fred was a few moments later, and then there were two small roaring cataracts both soon to be buried in the rising flood which they themselves had created. Arthur relieved Mr. Green and worked the second paddle on that side; the paddle at this lock was old and stiff and gave Arthur some trouble; but Fred was stronger and turned the stubborn handle round as if it had been the handle of a barrel-organ. Jane watched, delighted—the strong arms of Fred, the noisy spouts of water, the surge and gurgle under the surface, and the two boats mounting swiftly up the shining walls. At length, as the lock filled, there was a sudden quiet, the boats rode level with the lock-side, the last important drops trickled in at the corners of the gates, and Fred and Arthur stepped back to their tillers. There is something satisfying to the simple soul in the filling of a lock or in the rising of the tide; something complete and definite and powerful has been accomplished and some dim sense of this gave pleasure to the simple Jane.

The last trickle was silent, and now at last the gates would open. Mr. Green had a cunning device of his own by which, with an artful hitch of the tow-rope round the rail of the farther gate, the horse Beauty was made to open both gates; and he was proud of this, for in most boats this was done laboriously by one of the crew. Beauty turned his head as if to ask if this business was ever going to be finished. 'Hey, lad!' cried Mr. Green, Beauty pawed the gravel, and the gates swung slowly open. Mr. Green's running hitch slipped off the gate, and the taut rope, loosening, scattered a shower of brilliant rain. The *Prudence* dropped astern, Mrs. Green made fast the line at the right religious point and on the vessels went. They had worked hard for many minutes, and were a few feet higher for their pains. There are a hundred and fifty locks between Brentford and Birmingham, and this was only the third. At every lock the ritual was the same.

The *Adventure* slid in along the left-hand wall and never the right. Fred worked the right-hand paddles and Arthur always the left. But to Jane it was a beautiful and marvellous procedure, and she never threw off the fascination of the locks—those primitive miracles by which man has made ships to climb over mountains.

The locks are the landmarks and milestones and strenuous obstacles of the water highway. At the locks the boat-women draw their water, buy bread and milk; the lock-keeper comes out of his little house and, leaning over his garden fence, distributes the news of the day. On closing day the village lovers hang over the high gates and watch the boats go through, drawn by the water and the strange charm of the gipsy vessels. The old man sits above the lock and fishes. Two boats meet at a lock, and while they are waiting there are a few bold, laughing moments between the son of one and the daughter of another. They fancy each other, but the lock is filled, the girl steams out of the lock for Birmingham, the boy moves into the lock for London, and Heaven knows when they will exchange so many words again. Sometimes beside the lock an old inn hides among the trees, and there there will be boats tied up for the night. The men stable their horses and go into the public bar for old and mild and a noisy game of dominoes; the mothers go too, or stay in the boat with their babies; all night they sleep under the lock, where there is always the music of water, whether it be a murmurous trickle or the swollen roar of a full 'pound' cascading over the gates. And at five o'clock they rise up and travel on through many locks to sleep again to the music of a lock.

At the next lock Jane was allowed to try her hand with the windlass, but, straining with a will, could only move the stiff cogs a circuit or two, and that with painful jerks. Mrs. Green, with a sour smile, watched from the *Adventure*, but Fred said it was only a knack and she would soon have it. Jane, blushing and ashamed, swore that she would.

Next was Hanwell, where the canal climbs a hill beside the lunatic asylum, and there are seven locks in a quarter of a mile. They rise up in a stately perspective under the long curve of the asylum wall, a fine geometrical procession of terraces, a little askew because of the curve; and Jane

thought shrewdly that it was the kind of picture which Mr. Bryan would like to draw.

It was a slow passage through these locks, for there was much traffic coming down, and they must wait in every lock till the descending boat was ready to leave the lock ahead of them. Also, at each of these locks were two mysterious side-basins, and these too had 'paddles' to be wound up or dropped at the exactly right moment. Fred explained the importance of these, and how, with so many locks together, they were necessary to preserve the water in the 'pounds'; and Jane said humbly, 'Yes, Fred,' but did not understand it.

The locks seemed endless, but at last they reached 'the top' at Southall, and by that time the mysteries of locks were all revealed to her. She had learned to take a turn round a bollard with the stern-rope, and ease it a little through her hands as it took the strain. She knew how to drop a 'paddle' without catching a finger in the whirling cogs. Better still, she had lifted three paddles without the aid of man, heaving with all her small might on the stubborn handle; her arms ached and her hands were blistered, but she felt that she had proved herself, and Fred was pleased.

Then came a dull six miles past Southall and West Drayton, tall factories, rows of mean houses and never a lock; but at last the canal crept out into the fields, and a leafy reach led up into Cowley Lock, where there was an inn beside the towing-path, and here they lay for the night.

Mr. Green led Beauty away to be stabled and fed, and Mrs. Green lighted a little wood-fire on the bank and boiled the kettle there, because she had just polished up the stove and it was a pity to spoil it. Jane made herself useful, got out the mugs for tea, and cut slices of bread and cheese. There was not room for every one to sup in the cabin, but Mr. Green pulled down the bed from the wall and invited Jane, the honoured guest, to sit beside him. Mrs. Green sat on the locker, and Fred squatted on the step in the doorway. Arthur thought there were too many, and went off to the pub.

Mr. Green, sipping his tea, said, 'Well, young lady, you're welcome to the "Cut". We'll make a boatman of you yet. And how'd you like to live in a house like this?'

Jane looked admiringly at Mrs. Green's brass knobs, and said, 'It's ever so nice, Mr. Green.' But she thought to herself, 'It's a bit small.'

Mrs. Green said, 'Nice enough for an outing, but what about a lifetime?'

Mr. Green looked proudly round his tiny home and said, 'Well, I was born in this boat, and my father was born in this boat, and his father before him, and I don't ask for nothing better. Water-gipsies, that's what we are. I don't want no pictures—there's all the pictures I want,' and with his bread and cheese he pointed at the fairy castle on the cupboard door. 'Castles and hearts and roses, that's the old style, Miss Jane, and good enough for me. And, come to that, we get pictures all day, don't we, old lady, moving along?'

Mrs. Green made no response to this flash of poetry, except to say, 'D'you want more tea?'

Mr. Green said what he wanted was an old and mild, and, crouching carefully, he climbed over Mrs. Green and Fred, and departed for the pub. Any sort of movement was difficult in the cabin; Jane felt crushed under the low roof and wanted to escape. Mrs. Green said she would follow her lord when she had washed up.

Fred said, 'Coming for a walk, Jenny?' but Jane said she would stay and help Mrs. Green. She thought she had Mr. Green on her side, but Mrs. Green, she was sure, still strongly disapproved of her, and though she had very little thought of marrying Fred, she liked to be liked, and to be a success, whoever it was.

'Go with your father, boy,' hissed Mrs. Green, and Fred went, disconsolate.

Washing-up was a simple affair, for it meant dipping the mugs and plates in the canal, and wiping them with a dirty rag. Mrs. Green said nothing at all. She had a habit of saying nothing at all, and this was even more frightening than her hissing, unfriendly utterances. While she was making the bed ready and tidying the cabin Jane took the stick-mop and busily swabbed all the stern part of the barge. She drew much pleasure from the sudden freshness of the paint-work, and tried to twirl the stick across her arm as she had seen the boatwomen do; but this was

too much for her. However, Mrs. Green came out of the cabin and looking round, said almost with approval, 'Not so bad, my lass.' Jane's instinct had been right; for Mrs. Green cleanliness of the *Adventure* was next to godliness, or even higher; and Jane felt she had won a good mark at last.

In the warm public bar Arthur was playing darts and Fred and Mr. Green were playing dominoes with a very noisy old boatman from the *Seven Sisters*. Jane drank lemonade and Mrs. Green stout, and for a long time neither of them said a word. Fred's eye wandered continually from the dominoes to Jane, till Mrs. Green told him about it.

In half an hour it was 'Time, gentlemen, please', and they all returned to the boats, stepping carefully over the narrow gate of the lock. The night was fine, the stars of Heaven swam in the lock, and Jane would have liked a little walk with Fred. But early to bed is the boatman's habit, and Fred, besides, was afraid of his mother.

Mr. Green retired to the *Prudence* and slept with Fred, Arthur slept in the tiny cubbyhole forward, and Jane, in some alarm, sat on the locker in the *Adventure*, and prepared herself for a night with Mrs. Green. In the *Blackbird* every one undressed for bed, and Jane had brought her nightie in a calico bag. She began to undress, and had almost taken off the grey jersey which Mrs. Raven gave her when she saw through the neck-hole that Mrs. Green had already completed her preparations for the night. Mrs. Green had taken off her boots. She then crawled on to the bed, breathing heavily, and turned her face to the wall. Jane thought, 'My nightie will be a knock-out', and hastily drew back the jersey over her head and pulled it down again. She then took off her shoes, and, as a small assertion of independence, her stockings as well, and lay down in her clothes beside Mrs. Green.

'Good night, Mrs. Green,' she said, her voice very small.

'Put out the light,' croaked Mrs. Green, like one laying a curse, and Jane was so much alarmed that she took four puffs to blow out the lamp.

Mrs. Green then made a great heave with her body, and thrust out her stern, so that the narrow ledge on which Jane lay was reduced by half. Mrs. Green snorted, as if

to say, 'I'll teach you to run after an honest boatwoman's son,' and almost instantly began to snore. She had carefully closed the door, but the sliding hatch above it was open a little, and Jane could see a square foot of sky and three bright stars. She could hear the melodious murmur of the lock-water, and sometimes the hoot of an owl. She lay listening and looking and thinking of Mr. Bryan. She said to herself that it was a funny world. After all her grand expectations about Mr. Bryan, to be sharing a bed with a smelly old woman who slept with her clothes on! Mrs. Green might keep the boat clean, but Jane was sure that she did not wash herself as often as Jane did. This sleeping in clothes had impressed her strongly, and Jane for the first time in her life had a sense of class-superiority. If she married Fred she would be lowering herself, instead of raising herself by—yes, she had really thought of it—by marrying Mr. Bryan.

But Mr. Bryan, of course, was all over, and Jane thought about Fred. She wondered what it would be like to share a little bed like this with Fred. Mrs. Green drew up her knees so that Jane had to clutch the side of the bed to keep her place. It would be another thing, of course, if it was Fred. She would have the inside berth, next to the wall, for one thing, and Fred would do what he was told, for another. But how about a lifetime, as Mrs. Green had said? How about night after night in a bed like this? Not so bad, perhaps, if it was Fred. The cabin, after all, was as large as her cabin in the *Blackbird*, though much less airy and high. She gasped in the stuffy heat, and her limbs felt sticky under her clothes. But Mrs. Green slept well enough. Her snoring ceased suddenly, and, after a deep sigh, began again on another and more contented note, like the second movement of a symphony. Would Fred snore, Jane wondered? Somebody had told her one could cure a man of that. Apart from this bed question, it was a fine life, certainly. Her Destiny was on the water, she had always thought, and it would be a fine thing to belong to the canal, and be a sort of sailor, as nearly a sailor as a girl can be. She travelled in her mind again those few exciting miles from Brentford, and thought chiefly of the brave things she had done herself, as men go over their

cricket triumphs, or score great goals in recollection—how she had caught the rope which Fred had flung to her, how she had worked at those back-breaking 'paddles', how she had surprised Mr. Green by her handling of the tiller and pleased his wife by swabbing the deck. To-morrow she would do better still and show them that a girl off the shore could be as good a boatman as any one.

But in all this there was not much queenery, she thought, and nobody at all like Mr. Bryan. Probably she would come down to sleeping in her clothes like Mrs. Green. Nevertheless, she had half a mind to marry Fred, if he asked her again. When Fred and Arthur married, the old people would retire, Fred said, and live at Brentford; and then she would be Queen of the two boats at least. Her boat would be the cleanest on the canal, with more castles than any of them, with bright white Turks' heads and innumerable brass knobs. Life was a muddle. And with this inconclusive reflection, lying still on her back (for she was afraid to move), Jane fell asleep.

XII

NOCTURNE

AT five o'clock in the morning Mr. Green fetched Beauty and they set forth again. The boatman's working-day, if he works with a horse, is from sunrise to sunset. A white mist lay low on the country, and the light was thin and bloodless; sometimes, from the stern of the *Prudence*, the horse Beauty could not be seen, and the two quiet boats seemed to glide through the mist by some ghostly power. The Green family were silent, or spoke in low tones, as if afraid to wake the sleeping world, though perhaps no ear would have heard them if they had shouted. Jane, at the tiller, whispered that she was cold, and Fred put his arm round her and said nothing, and they were happy.

The sun found them creeping northward among the woods above Uxbridge. A light breeze came up from the south and drove the last scared islands of mist along the water before them. The solemn, staring cows stood revealed in the fields, a moorhen scuttled into the reeds, colour and sound came back into the woods and warmth into the body, the mist melted away, and the long, straight reach of the canal lay like a silver ribbon ahead. No man was to be seen. Beauty quickened his pace, and Mrs. Green made tea.

All day the sun shone, all day the horse Beauty clip-clopped slowly northwards, and all day Jane knew more and more the tranquil fascinations of the canal. From this point it was all fine country, with, at intervals, the fringes of a tiny town, past which the canal ran proudly, sufficient to itself. The slowest highway in England, it seemed to have sought out the quiet corners of the country and thrown over them for ever the spell of its own antiquity and slowness. No fancy modern mansions, no great hotels stood on its banks; no pleasure-parties or gramophones disturbed its silences; nothing on it nor beside it happened quickly, not even the strong steam or motor-vessels could

make it modern ; and though for many a mile it might run between the high-road and the railway, it still remained a quiet world of its own, despising expresses and the rushing cars, and as remote from them as if they had been in the air. The passenger looks down from the flying train upon the canal, and thinks it a meagre and a murky stream, and wonders idly whither it flows. But the boatman at his tiller looks up and sees the railway tiny and the canal large, a river of adventure and hardship and toil, with a people of its own and a hundred years of custom and tradition which were old before the railway was imagined. Every boatman feels this and is proud of the 'Cut', and jealous for it. And this affection takes hold of those who live beside it or go upon it. It is in the public-houses and the rows of cottages and in the children playing on its banks. Ernest, born to the town, and the owner of a motor-bicycle, might have escaped it ; but Jane, grown on the water, was an easy prey. By the afternoon of this, the second day, she felt that she had travelled many miles and many days into a world which was new, but a world to which she belonged. Her father, Lily, the *Blackbird*, and Ernest seemed a hundred miles away, in the background of another life ; all that mattered was the next lock, whether it would be 'ready' for them, and whether she would distinguish or disgrace herself in the working of it. And even her foolish ache for Mr. Bryan was easier.

For a few miles up to Rickmansworth they seemed to have lost the railway and the road, and journeyed through a country solitude of farms and fields. Then on through the lovely park below King's Langley. Huge oaks and elm-trees climbed the green slopes, water-lilies fringed the banks, and rippling streams ran in and out of the canal, splashing merrily down the mill-race, tumbling in tiny cascades to the watercress beds, or forcing a slow path through the jungles of duckweed and vivid green forests of starwort. They crept round sudden corners into reaches cavernously dark with the shade of great trees, where no man would have guessed that this was the same grey man-made waterway which crawls past Paddington. They passed old houses hiding in the wood, and old walls hung with rock-plants or carpeted with ancient moss, and old

cottage gardens which were a sudden blaze of flowers—a screen of ramblers or a regiment of sweet-peas. They seemed a thousand miles from London, though by the map they might be twenty. And the lordly swan, moving lazily from under their bows, seemed to say, 'This is no place for Trade.'

Now they began the long climb up the gentle slopes of the Chilterns. There was a lock every quarter of a mile, and sometimes a cluster of two or three. There was another pair of boats not far ahead, going the same way, so that every lock was 'against' them; that is to say, they had to empty it before they could enter, and then fill it again—a double process. Luck is a great force, even in the navigation of a canal, and some days, the boatmen say, everything goes well, and others not a lock is ready for them. Now, to save time, with so many locks together, Fred marched ahead along the tow-path to get them ready, and by the time that Beauty had plodded up to one he would be busy emptying the one above, Jane with him, while Arthur steered the *Prudence*. She enjoyed this, because now she was really a help, as Fred said, if it was only saving him a walk round the lock to shut the farther gate. Fred had given her a leather belt and a spare windlass to tuck in it, and she tried to march along the tow-path as she had seen the sturdy boat-girls do, with her arms swinging across her body in front, and the windlass swinging in the belt behind her. All the afternoon they slowly climbed the hill, and crossed the fields, a few feet up, a few hundred yards on. But Fred pointed to a hill-side patched with corn and yellow mustard which had been above them, and was now below, and Jane agreed that it was a wonder.

At Berkhamsted, not far from the 'Summit', the locks came thick and fast—one at every street corner, said Fred. The banks were alive with old men and children fishing for gudgeon; the children crowded round the locks to see the boats go through, and Jane felt proud that she belonged to the canal and was a spectacle. And here began the 'dramma' of Ruth.

Another boat had just come down, so that the locks were ready for them, and Jane and Fred had returned to the

Prudence. They passed a big timber-yard where two boats were loading. They were called *Mary* and *Martha*. From the cabin of the *Mary* a girl popped up her head, a few feet only from them. She was a comely, lusty girl, short and strong in the true breed of the canal-girls: short for the cabins and strong for the locks. She had bare, muscular arms, and these and her face were coloured a warm russet; she wore black ear-rings and her eyes were black; she had a tip-tilted nose and a startled, fierce expression; her black hair was untidy and her white blouse dirty, but Jane felt herself a feeble creature in the presence of Ruth Walker.

'Evenin', Ruth,' said Fred, with an uneasy tone, as the *Prudence* glided past.

Ruth saw Fred first. Her face was eager, but her voice was shy. 'Evenin', Fred,' she said. 'I left you——' Then she saw Jane and stopped. She said, 'Hullo!' and stared at Jane, a hard, fierce stare. Jane felt hot.

The *Prudence* glided on. Ruth ducked her head under the cabin-top, and disappeared; Jane heard her cry 'Dad!' as one who has news to tell. Fred cried 'Ruth?' anxiously. Fred looked hot also. There was no sign from the *Mary*, and Beauty clumped inexorably on. The *Adventure* swung round the bend and was half-way through the bridge when Ruth's head appeared again, and the head and chest of a tall man with a soldierly moustache. 'That's her father,' said Fred. The two couples stared at each other over the lengthening stretch of water until the low corner of the bridge came between them.

'Case of so near and yet so far,' remarked Jane. She supposed Fred had been walking out with the girl, and she remembered now that one of the Brentford women had said something about 'Ruth'; but she did not mean to ask questions, because Fred had been very good about Ernest, and had made no unpleasantness beyond saying once that Ernest's way of talking gave him a stomach-ache. However, curiosity was too much for her, and she said, 'Friend of yours, Fred?'

'I seen her Whitsun,' said Fred, uncomfortably, and, since it was August now, Jane thought, evasively; but what he said was true. Courting on the canal is a haphazard, difficult affair, and even more the sport of chance

than it is in other quarters. By chance the *Prudence* and the *Mary* were both lying up at Leighton Buzzard over the Whitsun 'stoppage', when locks are repaired and all traffic ceases. Ruth and Fred had walked out for three days, and since then had never happened to be stationary at the same place at the same time.

Their boats had travelled up and down the canal, as remote as the lovers on the Grecian urn. They met suddenly, between locks, as the *Mary* and the *Martha*, which were power-boats, purred up, tut-tutting, and overtook the *Prudence*. And as they slid past Fred would look at Ruth and say, 'Hullo, Ruth,' and perhaps she would blush, remembering old caresses. Then they would call out their plans and movements, and wave a hand and be lost to each other again. Also, they left little messages at certain locks, dictated to the lock-keeper or one of the toll officials, for neither Ruth nor Fred could read or write. Many love-affairs began thus promisingly and lingered on thus distantly, like the loves of song-birds separately caged, until through some new accident they matured or dwindled. And Jane was here the fatal accident.

Jane was pleasantly stirred by this encounter. The jealous glare of the girl, the hostile pursuit of those two pairs of eyes, the sudden meeting and instant separation, so much expressed and so little said—it was wonderfully like the pictures. She saw it clearly on the screen. '*An Old Flame*' would be the introduction, then '*Ships That Pass in the Night*', and then '*Ruth Declares War on Her Rival*'. She could see Ruth and her father kneeling on the floor, rolling their eyes.

She did not feel jealousy or pique about Fred's old flame; rather he rose in her opinion, for there must be something more in him than she suspected if he had clicked with that attractive girl. And Fred as the hero of a real 'dramma' was much more interesting than he had been before.

The sun went down, and in the warm twilight they climbed up through the last few locks. About eight o'clock they tied up for the night below the Cow Roast. The Cow Roast Inn is the first landmark of the 'Summit'; and the next lock beyond it begins the descent of the Chilterns. Contrary to his habit, Mr. Green did not at

once take Beauty to the stables, but tied him to the fence. One of the Company's men from the check office said, ' 'Evenin', Fred Green. I've a letter for you.' Fred said, ' Thanks, Mr. Oliver,' and held out his hand. The man seemed surprised, but glanced at Jane, smiled knowingly, and with an enormous wink gave Fred the letter, which bore no stamp. He was in the habit of reading Ruth's letters to Fred, and thought Fred to mean that this was not a convenient occasion. But Fred was not ashamed of Ruth Walker.

He stood shamefaced a moment or two, fingering the letter, but not opening it; and Jane said at last, ' Why don't you read your letter, Fred ? ' and then, remembering the remark which Ruth Walker had left unfinished, ' Is it from the dark girl, Fred ? '

Fred said, ' I dunno, Jenny. I dare say.'

' Well, go on, Fred. I shan't be jealous.'

Fred stammered and looked down, and said, ' I can't read, Jenny.'

' Go on ? ' said Jane, who had caught this expression from Fred.

' It's a fact, Jenny. Never had no schooling, you see. There's a lot of us the same. Ruth can't read an' write neither.'

' Well, you surprise me ! ' And indeed, it was a shock. She had never been able to persuade Fred to go to the pictures, and this, she supposed, was the reason: Fred was sensitive about his lack of education.

' Give it to me,' she said gently. ' I'll read it, Fred.'

' That don't seem right, Jenny.' For it seemed strange to have a love-letter from one girl read out by another.

' All right, Fred. It's just as you like.'

' Well, I dunno,' said Fred.

He did not wish Jane to think that there was more between Ruth and himself than there was, and he knew that Ruth's letters, dictated with great embarrassment to a male official, said very little as a rule. And he handed over the letter.

Jane opened it and read solemnly:

' Dear Fred we are loading timber at Marley's for Braunston shall be Braunston Saturday night with luck

hoping I may see you Fred as I should like to see you dear Fred hoping that this finds you all well as we are champion Ruth.'

'And seven crosses,' said Jane.

'Mr. Oliver puts them in,' said Fred uncomfortably.

'Tell us another, Fred!' She was not jealous, but it did seem strange that Fred could not read a letter; and she had for the second time a sense of class-superiority. 'Well, I'll teach you to read,' she said.

At supper Mr. and Mrs. Green said little and seemed worried. Jane had seen them muttering together and looking back down the canal. At length they heard the tutter-tutter of a power-boat. Mr. and Mrs. Green exchanged glances, Mrs. Green stood up, peeped out, and, returning, hissed, 'It's him. Don't take no notice of him.' And she said kindly to Jane, 'Another cup of tea, my dear?' Jane guessed that Ruth and her father had caught them up and that trouble was expected. But it was surprising that this should make Mrs. Green kinder to her. 'Case of all stick together,' she thought, which was correct; the threat of battle had closed the ranks.

They heard the *Martha* and the *Mary* swish past. A thick voice shouted close to them, 'Where's that young bastard? Afraid to show his face?' Fred made a movement, but Mrs. Green, restraining him, said again, 'Don't take no notice of him. He's drunk.' 'Tying up?' asked Mr. Green; he cocked his head and there was an anxious silence in the cabin. Mrs. Green nodded grimly. The *Martha* and the *Mary* were tying up just in front of them! It was from fear of this and what might follow that Mr. Green had kept the horse Beauty handy for a sudden departure. The Greens were respectable and detested 'unpleasantness'.

Presently they heard the same thick voice, violent and loud. Mr. and Mrs. Green began to talk, hurriedly, for the voice was hurling abuse at the Greens and their boats, their children, their history, and their professional ability. Mr. Walker was of Irish extraction and in the Great War had joined the Irish Guards. He was proud of this, and of his medals, which he always wore; for one good reason or another few of the canal-folk had penetrated to the infantry,

and he was fond of drawing their attention to his own valour, especially when he was drunk. The boatmen are a sober lot, but Mr. Walker often took too much, and to-day he had been refreshing himself while his boat was loading. At first he contented himself with shouting, 'Come out, the bastard! Let's see your dirty face!' Then he said something about double faces, and young men who played fast and loose with innocent girls. He said no doubt a common boatman's daughter was not good enough for the 'young bastard', he must have a dolled-up London girl. He stood swaying on his cabin-top, and said that he had fought for his bloody country while the young bastard and his bloody father had stayed at home. Fred was fifteen at the end of the War and his father fifty, so it was fortunate that all this was drowned by the busy talk of Mrs. Green. Jane did her part and began to tell them the story of the Derby. Then Mr. Walker, finding that his taunts drew no response, attacked with a sure instinct the professional pride of the Greens. 'Couple o' dirty horse-boats!' he cried, and 'I'm a bloody soldier, and I never see such dirty boats! Dirty boats, dirty cabins——' and he developed the theme. No one can pretend for ever to be deaf to abuse of himself, and this awful charge pierced all defences and pricked the Greens in a vital spot. Mr. Green sprang up, bumping his head. Mrs. Green croaked 'Leave him alone! Don't take no notice of him!' and instantly rushed out into the well herself.

The others followed. It was a fine night, and the moon had risen, nearly full, behind the trees. The last dusk of day was melting into moonlight. There was no wind, no sound of traffic, and Man and Nature seemed at peace. Two pairs of lovers, on their way to the fields, hung over the lock-gates and curiously watched the battle begin. And Jane, the cause of battle, watched curiously too, and, truth to tell, enjoyed it.

Mr. Walker still stood on the cabin-top. His two brothers, older men, stood on the path beyond, inviting Mr. Walker, now and then, to come off it. The girl Ruth, with her elbows on the roof, stared sullenly at Jane, and said nothing.

Mrs. Green shouted, or rather croaked, 'Don't show your ignorance, Henry Walker. You're drunk.'

'That's right,' said Mr. Walker scornfully. 'Put the old woman up. There's not a man among you—not a man among you! Who stayed at home? They *all* stayed at home; that's right, isn't it?' He turned as if for confirmation to the lovers, who had never set eyes on any of the parties before, and expressed no opinion.

'Let me flatten him!' cried Mr. Green angrily, while Fred used a word which Jane had never heard. But Mrs. Green, who had now picked up the coal-hatchet, held it out at arm's length, barring the way.

'Keep back, Tom Green,' she said. 'Don't soil your hands with him! Stay where you are, Fred, and don't take no notice of him, or you're no son of mine.' The two men held back obediently, much more afraid of Mrs. Green than of Mr. Walker. The old woman dominated the scene. Her lips trembled and her hands, but her eyes flashed fury and power; her croaking voice had grown huskier with her rage, and yet some indomitable force of will took hold of her words and carried them to her enemy. She brandished the hatchet and croaked, 'War, is it? There was never much fighting where you were, Henry Walker. You're a coward, Mr. Walker, drunk or sober, and we can all swear to that.'

Mr. Walker swayed, and he looked about him, as if to appeal to the testimony of Nature. His eye fell upon the horse Beauty, which was feeding in the hedge, and he said, 'Say that again, Mrs. Green, and I'll let loose your horse!'

Undeterred by this threat, Mrs. Green yelled, 'Coward, coward, coward, *cow-ard*!' And, as if to meet the challenge squarely, she added in a lower tone, 'Drunk or sober.'

Mr. Walker jumped to the tow-path, staggered to the horse Beauty and untied him. But if he expected that the liberated horse would gallop madly down the tow-path he was disappointed, for Beauty remained exactly where he was. Mr. Walker gave him a buffet in the ribs with his fist, but at this hour of the day Beauty required some much more powerful stimulus, and he did not move. Mr. Walker turned then and kicked into the canal the little fire of sticks which Mrs. Green had built on the bank.

This childish exhibition proved soothing rather than enraging to the Greens. It showed the enemy in all his meanness, and put him out of court. The men looked on

In silent scorn, and Mrs. Green said pitifully, 'There's a man for you; there's a brave fighter—women and horses!' But Mr. Walker, on his way back to the *Mary*, turned sharply and stepped on to the prow of the *Adventure*. There he faced Mrs. Green and yelled, 'Horse yourself, you dirty old cow!' At once the Greens flared up in a fiercer fury than before—not for Mr. Walker's strange accusation, but for his trespass on the boat. Insults they could endure with dignity, but a hostile foot across the frontier was another matter. Their boat was their home, their castle, and temple, and must be inviolate. Fred and Mr. Green jumped off the boat, one with a long pole, the other with a landing-plank, and ran along the path towards the bows. But Mrs. Green was before them. A long, narrow plank went forward from the cabin-roof, above the cargo, and the old woman ran along this airy track with startling agility, shouting, 'Take your foot off this boat! Take your foot off this boat, you dirty man!' She was the first to come within striking distance of Mr. Walker. She halted above him, she raised her hatchet, and croaking, hissing, poured upon him a flood of abuse, threats, curses, blasphemy. She was a terrible figure in the moonlight—a witch, a fury, an avenging shadow on the sky. Her arm sawed up and down with the hatchet; six or seven times it came within a few inches of Mr. Walker, and at every swing Jane expected to see it split the offending head. She watched, fascinated and admiring, half-hoping that it would. Fred and Mr. Green watched also, holding their pole and plank at the ready, but not interfering; and beyond them stood the two brothers of Mr. Walker in similar postures. It seemed to be understood on both sides that this was a battle of champions, at which the main bodies of the tribes were present only to see the right triumphant, and carried arms only as seconds or squires.

Mr. Walker stood his ground, too drunk to be afraid, and shouted back at Mrs. Green. Jane had not heard much bad language on the canal, nor is it much employed, for the boatmen as a rule are peaceable and gentle folk. But now new worlds of obscenity and malediction were opened to her. The shouts of the two combatants were shocking in the quiet night. Mrs. Green's voice weakened, till her

curses sounded like the last despairing utterances of a dying woman. Her breath came in gasps, she tottered on her narrow perch. And at last, fearing perhaps that she would soon be reduced to silence, and so deprived of her principal weapon, she raised the hatchet high above her head, as if to give the death-blow. 'Alive or dead, Henry Walker,' she hissed, 'you'll get off this boat.' The hatchet, polished like all Mrs. Green's possessions, flashed in the moonlight, and trembled over the hated skull. All the men saw that the possessed woman had arrived at the summit of her rage. Fred called anxiously, 'Chuck it, mother,' and one of the brothers, 'Come off it, Henry. She's potty, can't you see?' Mr. Walker at last perceived his peril, and, stepping backwards, slowly left the boat. Mrs. Green lowered her hatchet, and without another word walked back along the plank. Mr. Walker retired to his own boat, remarking again that he was a bloody soldier.

'Well done, old lady,' said Mr. Green, but Mrs. Green said to Fred and Jane, 'Take yourselves off, you two. He'll be back again in a minute, and I want no unpleasantness,' as if what had gone before had been no more than a polite difference of opinion.

So Jane and Fred walked down the tow-path, back towards Berkhamsted, to avoid passing the *Martha*. Fred put his arm round Jane, and presently Jane put her head on his shoulder, and so, a little awkwardly, they walked under the moon.

When they had walked a quarter of a mile Fred said, 'Sorry about the turn-up, Jenny'; by which he meant the battle.

Jane said, 'It's all right, Fred. I liked it. Your mother's fine.'

'She's a caution,' said Fred.

Jane felt drawn to Fred by the turn-up, and by all the exciting events of the day; but especially by the turn-up. It pleased her as a 'dramma', so many people worked-up and registering emotion, as people did in the pictures—and all for her sake. That was something new, a fierce battle about Jane Bell. And now here she was, the prize of victory, being carried off by the conqueror. It was exciting and sweet, and she rested her head on Fred's shoulder.

Fred was also excited, and wondered whether he should propose marriage this evening or not. He dimly perceived that this moment, after the turn-up, was propitious; and now he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. He wondered what Jane was thinking, and her head gave him courage. But a proposal must be prepared for, he knew; and presently he stopped and stooped and kissed her.

She returned his kiss more warmly than she had ever done. But she said, 'You mustn't kiss me with your hat on, Fred.' He took off his cap and kissed her again. 'You're coming on,' she said.

He put on his cap again, and she put her head on his shoulder, and they walked on, not saying a word. Twice Fred halted and repeated this process, each time a little more boldly, before they reached the lock by the village of Northchurch. From the lock-side they could see the square tower of the church, a little way from the bank, and Fred thought of a plan.

'It's a nice church, that one,' he said.

'Pretty, isn't it?' said Jane.

They walked up the street to the churchyard gate, and stared at the silent tower and the pale monuments of the villagers and the yew-trees throwing shadows over their graves. Jane felt good and solemn and afraid.

'Gives me the creeps,' she said.

This was not quite what Fred had planned; he drew her close with his strong right arm, he cleared his throat, he thought for many minutes, and at last he said, 'Think you might come to church with me one day, Jenny?'

'Sunday?' said Jane.

'Well, any day. You know what I mean.'

'Oh, *that*?' said Jane. 'Well, I dunno, Fred.'

Fred could not think of anything more to say, so he was silent.

Presently Jane said, 'Better go back, perhaps.' So they walked back to the lock.

But at the lock they sat down on one of the great beams which swing the gates open. Fred, uttering at last a question which had fretted him severely, said, 'Are you gone on that Ernest, Jenny?'

Jane said, 'I wouldn't say I was gone on him, Fred.'

Then she went on surprisingly, 'I like you, Fred. And I like your old canal.' And she pressed the hand which was clasping her own.

Fred was so much surprised and moved and pleased that he was embarrassed, and did not know what to do next. So he stood up, and they walked back along the tow-path. As they walked, Fred cursed himself, for he saw too late that he had missed an opportunity and should have stayed where he was. Lately he had been asking discreet questions of young men who knew about girls, and he had learned that man must take a thing called the 'Inishative', and use his opportunities; also that when a girl said 'No' as often as not she meant 'Yes', and when she said 'I dunno' she meant 'Yes, I should say so!' The difficulty was that this might be one of the rare cases when she meant no more than she said. But Fred felt reckless to-night; or, rather, he felt that he ought to feel reckless. So when they came to the gate of a late hayfield, where the hay still lay uncarried, he said, 'Let's go in here,' and, Jane making no objection, they went. Fred thought proudly that he had taken the 'Inishative', and determined to keep it.

They sat down upon an untidy haycock which was a little damp with dew, but they were both accustomed to the damp. And now Fred put his arms round Jane and kissed her for the first time with a spark of passion. But even as he did so he thought, 'She'll scream or slap me—it's all over now,' and he loosened his embrace just when, as any of his young men who knew about girls could have told him, he should have strengthened it.

Jane thought, 'Fred's a puzzle,' for she had been ready to be hugged, but just as she was yielding herself Fred let her go.

She said, 'You don't like me at all—not really, Fred.'

He was roused, and said eagerly, 'Yes, I do, Jenny,' taking hold of her arm.

She said, 'You're hurting,' and he released her. She said, 'Well, I like you, Fred; only—I dunno.' She looked at the moon and said, 'It's a nice moon, isn't it?'

He stared at her face for a full minute, wondering whether she would say something more. But Jane was thinking, 'Fred can't read and write,' and wondering whether it mattered.

She said nothing, and Fred thought that he should take

the 'Inishative' again. He put his hands on her shoulders and gently pressed her back so that she lay flat among the hay. She did not resist. The sight of her lying on her back gave him a sense of power which frightened him. He kissed her reverently, and felt wicked. She lay drowsy in the hay, drowsy with air and the scent of hay and the stillness of the hot night; her eyes were shut and she was half-way to sleep. Fred crouched beside her, gazing tenderly at the beloved face, which was a small white moon in the shadow of his body. So they remained for many minutes. Fred was happy and Jane was contented, and neither wished for anything more. For Fred was in Heaven, alone with his love, alone for the first time, since never before had he kissed her save in a public place; and Jane was in a blissful repose of body and mind, not wild about Fred as he was about her, but liking to be with him, lying cosy in the hay. And her only thought was that she was glad it was Fred, and not Ernest, who would have pawed her about and disturbed the peace.

But poor Fred, conscious always of his inexperience, could not be satisfied that he was doing right, and began to wonder what he ought to do next. He felt that something was expected of him, and if he did nothing he would probably be accused of being backward. So he put his arms round her and lay down beside her, and drew her gently to his rough blue jersey. The jersey tickled her face, so she put the top of her head against it, and she went to sleep. He was very uncomfortable, for he was resting on one elbow at the edge of the hay, and with the other arm supporting Jane's weight, but he would not move for fear of waking her. He looked up at the moon, and he looked down at Jane curled up in his arms, and he wondered whether she would marry him.

At last his limbs were so stiff that he tried to change his position stealthily, without waking her; but she woke up and rubbed her drowsy eyes, and lying back on the hay stretched out her arms behind her head. The movement inflamed Fred, and suddenly, like a clumsy bear, he rolled over and kissed her long and lustily at last. When he raised his head she smiled up at him and said, 'Well, Fred?' He thought she meant, 'Well, and what next,

Fred ? ' but what she meant was, ' Well, who'd have thought it ! ' This was the boldest approach which any man had made to her, but she was not excited, only curious. It seemed that nothing Fred could do could excite her, or offend her. He was like a child, or an awkward dog. She thought curiously, ' Is poor old Fred trying to act like Ernest ? ' and she waited curiously to see what he would do, as one might watch a small child use the telephone. And he was so nice and she was so sleepy that she was not disposed to argue about it, whatever he did. Fred was sure now that something was expected of him, so hugging her again he prepared himself for further boldnesses, though his heart was full of respect and reverence, and while he trembled for love he was already ashamed. Thus the moon and the summer night and the two young people at cross-purposes made mischief together ; and Jane came very near to losing her honour, for no better reason than many another of earth's daughters have done. But just then the church bells chimed the hour, and ten o'clock clanged slowly across the fields. Far away though they were, the bells were compelling in the stillness.

' Ten o'clock,' said Fred, and in silence they listened, counting the strokes. They reminded Jane of the churchyard gate, where she had felt solemn and good, and in one of those flashes of her picture-house mind she saw the ' dramma ' of the scene—the young girl going astray—' *On the Edge of the Abyss* '—but summoned back to safety by the wholesome sound of the bells. There would be a picture of the bell-ringer, and a close-up of the largest bell.

After the last stroke she thought, ' Well, it's true enough —I've been a bad girl, leading Fred on,' though consciously she had done nothing of the sort. And she said briskly, ' Get up, Fred. No more playing about.'

They sat side by side while Jane tidied her hair. Fred took her hand, and said timidly,' What about the church, Jenny ? '

Jane yawned and said, ' Well, I dunno, Fred. I'll tell you to-morrow.'

Mrs. Green asked no questions, and kissed her when she came to bed.

In the morning, to avoid unpleasantness, Mr. Green delayed starting until the *Martha* and *Mary* had left. But

as they steamed away Mr. Walker and his brothers all called a polite 'Good morning,' according to the unrecorded custom of the tribes. Mr. Walker had set foot on the *Adventure* and Mrs. Green had forced him to retire, and now Fred Green was at liberty to marry whom he would. But Ruth Walker was not to be seen.

Beauty plodded across the Tring Summit between high banks clothed with a jungle of bushes and young trees. At Marsworth they began to climb down the hill, and the locks grew thick again. Jane went ahead with Fred or Arthur, and all day she debated what answer she should give to Fred's question. She liked Fred, and she loved the canal; she loved the boats and the business of the locks, the clang of the gates, the rattle of the falling 'paddles', the rush of water, the patient Beauty, the taut rope glistening in the sun, the green fields to right and left, the open air, the quiet, and the wandering useful life. For that life she was fitted by Nature. 'Cut out for it,' she thought. Already, in the two days, had she not done wonders? Mrs. Green, who had been her enemy, was now her friend, and had kissed her; and Fred said that Mrs. Green had said that Mr. Green had said she was a rare one. Already she was one of the family, and they all wanted to keep her. She knew as much about locks as any boat-girl, though she was wearing gloves because of her blisters; and Fred had said that very soon she should go ahead and get ready a lock by herself.

'It's the call of the water,' she thought, and her instinct said that she ought to obey it; besides, she had read somewhere that every one ought to do what they were fitted for. But what would become of Lily and her father? And how about the artist's model, and raising her 'stattus'? What was her Destiny? Could it be her Destiny to sleep in her clothes, and marry a man who could not read or write? Poor Fred! Fred was a puzzle. Fred would be a good husband to a girl, but he was a long way from Love's Bliss. How was it, she thought, that Fred could not excite her, even when he hugged her and crushed her lips, while Ernest with a single touch of his covetous hands could make her tingle, and at the mere thought of Mr. Bryan her heart seemed to tremble? Yet Fred, very likely, was the best man of the three.

Thus Jane's little mind went round and round and came to nowhere. The day was lovely, and Jane, with a new rich colour in her cheeks, felt fresh and healthy from the sun. The sun fought for Fred, the smiling country-side said 'Fred', and the thunder of the locks was all for Fred. But in the late afternoon, above Fenny Stratford, which the canal-folk call 'Finny', Fred, knowing not what he did, sent Jane ahead, as he had promised, to get the next lock ready by herself. This was another good mark for Fred, and Jane marched proudly on, eager to do him credit, and thinking only of him. And when she reached the lock the first person she saw was Mr. Bryan. The second person she saw was a lovely girl, with a mop of brown hair and a glorious smile, who was talking to Mr. Bryan, and smiling at him.

A long house-boat, one of the rare pleasure-vessels seen on the canal, was lying above the lock through which she had just passed. Two of the party were talking to the lock-keeper, and Mr. Bryan and the lovely girl were sitting on the roof. Jane felt suddenly weak, her heart raced, and, trembling, she put her hand on the rail of the lock-gate to steady herself. She thought afterwards, 'I know now how Ruth Walker felt.' But that did not matter now. Her dear Mr. Bryan, whom she was never to see again, was there before her eyes. She could not think why, but that also did not matter; what mattered was that he should turn and see her, with the fine fresh colour in her face, emptying the lock like a boat-girl born to it. She pulled herself together and crossed the closed gates, trudged up to the top end and dropped the 'paddles', and swung in the half-gate at the farther side; then back and across and up again to close the other half-gate; then back once more to the lower end to begin the heavy winding. She wasted no time, but at every turn, where it was possible, she looked shyly at the house-boat, and the couple on the roof, to see if he had recognized her. But he had not. He glanced at her, as all the party did, but saw nothing more than the usual grubby boat-girl toiling with a windlass; which meant that some one was coming up behind them, so they had better be off. And before Jane had finished they had gone.

She finished just in time, and swung the heavy gate open just as Beauty came in sight. She had looked forward to that moment, and to Fred's approving smile, but now that it was here her heart was so full of confusion and pain that she got no pleasure from her success. There was only one good thing to be said—Fred's question was answered now. For she knew that she could not marry Fred ; she could not marry any man unless he could afflict her with the awful weakness which had possessed her at the sight of Mr. Bryan. And while she watched the tumbling water in the lock she thanked her stars that she had seen him.

The long day ended at the village of Stoke Bruerne, and that is just below the Blisworth Tunnel, where for two miles the canal runs under the hill. Many boats lie up here for the night, and go through the tunnel with the first tug in the morning. Jane looked eagerly ahead as the boat rose in the lock, and there, sure enough, a little way on, lay the house-boat, with Mr. Bryan on the top, making a sketch. It was a very pretty little place, compact and sleepy, and altogether English. The Boat Inn and a few old cottages stood on one side of the lock, the ship-chandler's and the grocer's on the other. An old man fished above the lock, old men sat with their tankards on the bench outside the inn ; a few villagers stood gossiping by the doors, or looking idly but politely at the house-boat. The canal was here the village street and the marine-parade as well. Behind the Boat Inn was the church tower, perched in the tree-tops in the English way, and beyond were the warm, green sheltering hills. The railway was a mile away, and there was no noise nor ugliness nor hurry.

In this charmed corner Jane passed an unhappy night. Fred and Mr. Green walked along the tow-path and were soon in friendly conversation with the house-boat party. Jane prayed for Mr. Bryan to look her way, and yet was thankful that he did not. She was afraid to meet him now, with women of his own kind about him ; the barriers of class were up, and she felt a servant again. He would have to tell his friends that she had brought him his morning tea, and she would have to tell the Greens—there would be difficult explanations and she would blush. No, it was just as well that Mr. Bryan was blind. Yet she longed for a

single word with him; and helping Mrs. Green with the supper-things she was in such confusion of mind that she dropped a plate into the canal.

Mr. Green said that they were very pleasant-spoken gentlemen. At supper they could hear the happy laughter of the other supper-party; and presently the two gentlemen walked past the *Adventure* on their way to the inn. Jane, down in the cabin, heard the boots crushing the gravel, and her heart fluttered again. Perhaps he would look in and admire the cabin, as the gentleman did at Fenny Stratford. Fred, outside, said, 'Nice evening, sir.' The steps stopped and Mr. Bryan's voice said, 'Fine. You're very snug in here,' and, as he stooped to peep inside, she saw his face for a moment or two. He looked brown and well, and she loved him. She trembled and blushed and looked straight at him. His eyes ranged quickly over the plates and the flowers, the shining knobs and photographs, taking everything in, but from some instinct of courtesy not dwelling long anywhere. Then Jane thought they fell on her face and paused there; she thought he frowned faintly, as if he were thinking, 'Where have I seen that face?' She thought, 'Good evening, Mr. Bryan'; in her mind she said, 'Good evening, Mr. Bryan,' and 'Hullo, Mr. Bryan', and 'How are you, Mr. Bryan?' but her lips said nothing. She could not speak. And then, just as she would have spoken, he had gone. Then she felt a fool, and could have cried for her folly. But what was the use? 'Looked straight through me and never saw me,' she thought bitterly. 'Shows what a lot of good I am!' But Jane forgot that she was deep in the shadow, that she wore a handkerchief on her head and the country in her cheeks, and was a different person from the tidy miss who had called at the studio in her coat and skirt.

Mr. Bryan, before he slept, wondered again where he had seen that dim face in the dusk of the cabin. He decided that she reminded him of Jane-Bell, his model. But that could not be, for surely she would have spoken? A sister, perhaps? Well, in the morning he would go and enquire. But long before the house-boat party woke up the *Adventure* and the *Prudence* were ploughing through the tunnel, and Mr. Green was leading Beauty over the hill.

If she had gone to the Boat Inn that evening with the Greens she would have certainly have met Mr. Bryan ; for Mr. Green and Mr. Bryan played shove-halfpenny together. But Jane was walking out with Fred and explaining gently that she could not marry him. He asked her why, and she could only say, ' I dunno, Fred. I don't feel like marrying, you see.' She could not tell him that she was a born fool, who had fallen in love with a gentleman she would probably never set eyes on again—a gentleman who did not even know her when he saw her. They had a sad short walk and went to bed early.

The house-boat party went to bed late, and she lay awake listening for Mr. Bryan's laugh. At last there was silence, but still she did not sleep. A pool of moonlight lay across the cabin floor ; she looked up and saw the square of sky which had given her pleasure on the nights before. But now it was nothing ; all was spoiled—the canal and the boats and all her joy in them—for Mr. Bryan was asleep a hundred yards away and did not know she was there. Would not care if he knew, perhaps. She wondered whether he loved the lovely girl and painted her picture. Never before had she felt so sorely the tyranny of class. The lovely girl would be sleeping in a night-gown, or funny pyjamas, like ladies on the pictures. And she, poor Jane, was sleeping in her clothes, and had not washed all over for a week. It was this which stood between the likes of her and the likes of Mr. Bryan, and had stopped her mouth when he had looked into the cabin. A lot of nonsense, Ernest was right. But somehow she would rise above it. The model business had been a beginning ; and then Fred and his canal had pulled her down again. For a moment she was almost angry with Fred ; and yet she liked Fred, she was sorry for Fred. It was all a puzzle. Mrs. Green slept soundly and noisily. Perhaps if she slipped out on to the tow-path now Mr. Bryan would be painting a picture of the moon. Perhaps, after all, he would be glad to see her. She trembled at the thought and pondered it for a long time. She sat up in bed and put one foot on the floor. Mrs. Green stirred and stopped snoring, and Jane lay down again, told herself she was a born fool, cried a little, and went to sleep.

XIII

'MEANWHILE —'

IN the morning there was such a shadow of gloom over the Green family that Jane could not bear it. Mr. Green was silent and sad, and Fred silent and kind, and Mrs. Green silent and sour again. Jane went through the tunnel with them, a frightening passage in the dark. They were the last of a long line of boats hauled through by a tug, which filled the tunnel with sulphurous fumes. The wet walls glistened and dripped. Jane felt the hill heavy over her head, and the water noisome and threatening below, but for a while the little lozenge of light behind them was a comfort. When they turned a corner and were in the dark, she could see nothing but the faint light of a lantern on the tug's smoke far ahead of them. The tunnel twisted, and though Fred was steering the *Prudence* she bumped against first one wall and then the other. Jane, standing beside him, felt the clammy touch of the wall, and clung to him, shivering. At intervals there were air-holes through which a lonely ray of light came down and ghostly water fell on their faces. Fred said that there was eight foot of water in the tunnel and it was full of rats. Jane choked from the tug's fumes; she was oppressed by the blackness, the clammy walls, the dripping roof, the smoke, the noise of the engines, the earth above, the water below, the bumping of the boats, and the swish of the water in the dark. She clung to Fred; Fred put his protecting arm about her and longed to comfort her with kisses, but since all was over between them manfully held off. This nightmare lasted three-quarters of an hour.

On the other side of the hill they met Beauty again and Mr. Green in a state of melancholy. Jane told Fred she thought perhaps she had better go home because she could see she would only be a worry to them all. Fred said, 'All right, Jenny,' and lent her the money for the train. Mr. Green was very kind and said she was a champion

boatman, and only Mrs. Green said, 'The tunnel was too much for you, eh? Well, I told you it weren't all roses on the "Cut", my girl.' Jane said meekly, 'It isn't that, Mrs. Green,' and Fred said almost angrily, for Fred, 'You're all adrift, mother.'

Jane watched the tail of the *Prudence* retreating slowly round the corner. Fred waved, she blew him a kiss, and walked miserably to Blisworth Junction. All the way to London, as the train crossed and re-crossed the canal, she looked out of the window and said good-bye to remembered corners, locks which she had helped to fill, and stretches of the tow-path where she had walked with Fred. The train rushed past, despising the little world where yesterday they had crawled with such importance. But Jane envied the boat-girls waiting by the gates, for it was a world which she had lost, had won and thrown away. She told herself that she had made a mistake, and yet, thinking of Mr. Bryan, was glad that she had made it.

But 'Meanwhile——' as the pictures said, what were Lily and her father up to, she wondered? It seemed an age since Tuesday and anything might have happened.

Things had happened to Lily, who had gone to work for the first time and was already up to mischief. The Government had moved quickly and transported Lily to a large milliner's shop near Regent Street. The work did not please her, for she was not in the public part where she might have shown off her fluffy charms to customers, but hidden in the background with a number of other girls, where there was never a sight of a man from nine till five-thirty. They sewed on feathers and bits of ribbon, dressed and re-dressed hats, and made all such alterations and additions as might persuade customer A that she was buying something different from customer B. Indoors all day, Lily missed the plentiful fresh air to which she was accustomed and was very tired long before half-past five. And to a tired girl not used to it the long struggle home on the Underground was a torment. By the fourth evening Lily had decided that she could not go on with the life. It was hot that evening, and she thought she would try the bus for a change. The moment the clock struck she dropped her work, powdered her nose, and scampered out with the

other girls. Like them, she carried an absurd small attaché-case, made chiefly of cardboard. Like them, she wore an absurd small hat of black straw, modelled on the fine ladies' fashions, shaped like a cockle-shell and pinching tightly her golden hair, which struggled out in two protesting clusters in front of her ears. Like them, she walked with quick, short steps on her absurd high heels. Like most of them, Lily was worried about a ladder in her stockings, for now, like the others, she must wear silk stockings every day. They were all dressed too finely for their earnings; nearly all had pearl necklaces; they were all poor and proud and devoted to appearances; they all denied their stomachs for the sake of their looks. Many were silly and some vain. And yet any nobleman idling up Regent Street and scanning curiously that regiment of shop-girls must have seen much to make a nobleman ponder; many more faces that tempted him to turn his head than he saw at Ascot or any gathering of the rich; many more that had courage and liveliness and native humour and what is vaguely called character. Perhaps the good looks were more pretty than beautiful, perhaps the character was rather audacious than strong, perhaps the lively ones were more impudent than thoughtful; but at least there was life in the breed, and the promise of more.

Lily was not one of the plucky ones, but she looked very well in the dark blue coat and skirt which had belonged to Jane. She joined the crowd of women waiting for the bus and feebly fought for a place. From the first she was thrust back easily by elbows and shoulders more experienced than hers. The second was already crowded, and, as if anxious to inflict yet one more exasperation on the women, lumbered past the stopping-place and stopped fifty yards ahead. Lily clutched her bag and ran after it along the road, the sun in her eyes, the hot fumes of the traffic in her nose and throat. She reached the bus among the first, and at last, pulling by the handrail, set both feet triumphant on the step. Then the conductor said, 'Full up, ladies,' and with four or five others she was shaken off, like weary ducklings which strive in vain to mount their mother's back. Lily stamped her foot and could have cried. Tired and angry and hot, she retreated across the Circus to the Tube

station. Here was more jostling, more waiting in the queue, more dodging and colliding in the hurrying crowd. A young man in the lift noticed her pretty, flushed face as she came in. They were not far apart in the crowd, and over three or four shoulders Lily noticed the young man. She caught his interested but not bold glances and felt better at once. More and more people were herded into the lift till they stood jammed together as close as sheep penned up for the slaughter. The gates clanged and they descended into the pit, as patient as sheep, and as unquestioning. None asked themselves why they were there, and what they were there for, and to what strange purpose they were carted in droves from one place to another with much discomfort every day of their lives. The sun had shone all day, but not upon them. They began the day in a tunnel, and now they were travelling in a tunnel to see the sun set. All day the sun had been a tantalization through the windows, the sun had done nothing for them but make their work more difficult and the tunnel more tormenting; yet now as they stood sweating in the crush they murmured gratefully that it had been a lovely day.

The gates of the cage clanged again, and the sheep streamed out into the tunnel. Lily as she went took a peep at herself in a square of looking glass which advertised face-cream, and thought that she was looking well enough, considering all things. The young man walked slowly, keeping her in sight. The white-tiled tunnel ran down a slope and curved round many corners. A blast, a gale of wind swept suddenly up it and buffeted the sheep; men caught at their hats, and girls walked struggling against their skirts. The air did not cool or comfort, but was dry and chemical, and irritated without refreshing, like the wind of the desert. The young man, who wanted to write and thought he was a cynic, said to himself that this mode of travel in the tunnels under the town was one of the most artful feats of civilization: and he composed as he walked an ironical couplet,

> I pity the Arab, the barbarous Nube,
> Who rides on a camel and not in a Tube.

But, cynic or not, he took good care not to lose sight of Lily.

Along the platform the patient sheep huddled together in thick clusters, their obedient toes upon the white lines painted on the floor. There was a roaring in the bowels of the earth, and a train, like a lighted dragon, ran out of the cave, its voracious body swollen with heads and shoulders and uplifted arms.

Lily fought for a place in it, as she had fought for the buses, feebly and crossly and without success. The young man, behind her still, might have won a place, but chose to remain on the platform with Lily, who was left in the front rank, treading the white line. The next train they boarded without difficulty; that is to say, Lily was thrust violently by the press behind into a mass of bodies which seemed impenetrable; the attaché-case was almost torn out of her hands. There were no seats free, and not even a strap untaken. But she was on the train, and she stood gratefully in the middle, between two large gentlemen who were smoking pipes.

Each of the two gentlemen had an evening paper and was reading happily the story of a murder. Each was securely tethered to the roof by a strap, and each at intervals puffed out contentedly a cloud of thick smoke. Lily swayed between them, bouncing wearily from one to the other. The atmosphere was choking, heavy with smoke and the smell of humanity; at every station the impossible was done, and a few more bodies were squeezed into the car. Men got out, and, fighting their way to the door, trampled her feet or hurt her breasts. Her head ached and her hot hands were sore from clutching the attaché-case. One leg was pressed against the knees of an elderly bricklayer, who had done his day's work and reckoned he had a right to sit down, if any one had. After Hyde Park Corner the train lurched violently, and Lily would have fallen on to the lap of the bricklayer, but a man's arm caught her and restored her balance. Lily turned her head and smiled into the face of the young man in the lift, whom she had forgotten. He was close behind one of the gentlemen with pipes, and she wondered whether this was accidental; which it was not. Peeping sidelong at his reflection in the window she decided that he was a nice boy. The young man continued to stare at the back of her neck, and was sure that she was a nice girl.

At South Kensington many people left the train, but the seats in Lily's view were instantly taken. Wearily she clung to a vacant strap, hot and sticky from the hand of its last holder. Then she felt a tug at her arm; she turned and saw the young man making faces, and there was the seat next to the bricklayer empty! She sank into it exhausted, the young man raised his hat, and again she smiled her thanks, very prettily and warmly. He had done at the right moment the one service which could commend him most, and already he seemed quite a friend, thought Lily.

Nevertheless, there followed some awkward minutes. She wanted to look at him, but was sure that he was staring down at her, and did not want to be caught. But she grew self-conscious, felt her cheeks burning, and began to be annoyed by the rude gaze which she imagined. At last she decided that she must look at him, if she died for it, but only to give him a cross look and teach him manners. But when she did look up he was looking in another direction, though it was only a moment before that he had turned his head away. Now she was a little piqued by his lack of interest; but she took the opportunity to examine his clothes. His clothes seemed good, but well-worn and untidy. His face was pleasant in a comical way, with a rather pug nose and shaggy eyebrows. His hair wanted cutting, especially about the ears. His soft felt hat was very old and crumpled and dingy. He carried a large book. Lily could not imagine what he was, but anyhow he was a cut above any of the boys she knew, and lately she had remarked to Jane that all the Hammersmith boys were common and used the most awful language.

Then he looked at her, and she looked quickly away, as if this meeting of eyes had been a mere accident. But she had to look again, and there he was, still greedily admiring her. This time she boldly met his gaze, and at last he smiled, a pleasant, humorous smile, which very much improved his face, but showed that he had bad teeth. She smiled faintly, and the train ran into Earl's Court. And with this strange wooing the decline and fall of Lily began.

At Earl's Court there was the first real exodus of passengers. Those left in the train stretched their legs and sighed with relief, and the young man promptly sat down

beside Lily. He wasted no time, for he was dining with a friend at Baron's Court, which was the next station. The book under his arm was the *Chronicles of Casanova*; that gentleman's adventures were much in his mind, and he was determined in future to conduct his affairs with the same boldness and dispatch. And it was fortunate for him that his first experiment happened to be made upon the pliable Lily. He was a struggling freelance journalist and reviewer; he lived in Bloomsbury, and his name was Baxter. He had never had any success with women, with journalism, or anything else.

Mr. Baxter said, as he thought Casanova might have said it, 'Hot, isn't it?'

Lily fanned herself and replied, 'I should say so. I'm ever so tired.'

He said, 'Where do you work?'

'Fetter & Martin's.'

'Like it?'

Lily looked at him and shook her head. Mr. Baxter was delighted by her large blue, innocent eyes and country colour.

'Got far to go?' he inquired.

Lily looked away again, and Mr. Baxter transferred his gaze from her large blue eyes to the slight curves of her bosom. Lily, after a moment's thought, said, 'Chiswick', which had a better sound than Hammersmith.

Mr. Baxter judged that they were approaching Baron's Court, so with a Casanova ease of manner but a craven fluttering in his heart, he said, 'Care to come out to-morrow?'

Lily faced him, and almost for the first time in her life paused for reflection before making a decision. For this perhaps would be a fatal decision. All the deluded young women in the *Sunday Gazette* seemed to say to her, 'Pause'. For all she knew, this young man might be a schoolmaster, that wicked and dangerous class of person. He carried a large book, and that was suspicious. But he looked her straight in the eyes, which was a good sign, every one said. And, anyhow, she was very well able to look after herself. Had she not pushed Harry Stratton off his bicycle for passing a vulgar remark? But to gain time she said, 'Pardon?' and Mr. Baxter had to repeat his question in

louder tones, which embarrassed him, because he felt that every one in the train was listening and condemning his motives. Casanova, he was sure, had never had to repeat an invitation. Now Lily said, 'It's ever so kind of you,' and Mr. Baxter, hurriedly, because the train had stopped, said, 'Meet me at the Café George, six o'clock. My name's Baxter.' Lily nodded, though she had no idea where the Café George was, and Mr. Baxter rushed out through the sliding doors just before they closed—not, he was afraid, a very dignified departure.

One of the girls at the shop knew all about the Café George, which, as it happened, was just across the road. It was rather grand, instead of rushing off with the rest, to dawdle before the looking-glass, murmuring that she had an appointment in town; and she doubled her allowance of powder (she had not yet acquired the lipstick).

Excepting, perhaps, the big Royal Picturedrome, the Café George was the most magnificent building which Lily had ever entered. She waited, a little frightened, in the domed entrance hall, where an aspiring fountain strove upwards to the golden tiles, and flunkeys arrayed like the monarchs of the Balkans moved in rubber soles across the marble floor. Mr. Baxter came soon, they greeted shyly, and he led her at once into a room all looking-glass and purple plush. They sat down on purple plush with a vast looking-glass behind them and a vast looking-glass before them. Lily examined herself across the room, and thought she looked pale beside the other ladies who were there. The room was full of people, most of them talking; the lights were bright, there was the clink of glasses, and yet Lily thought that most of those present looked tired and unhappy. There were many lonely men who did not talk, but leaned upon their elbows and sipped at little glasses, gazing straight in front of them. There were many couples of gaily-dressed women, some very young, some very robust, whose eyes, while they talked, wandered ceaselessly about the room and rested chiefly on the lonely men. They were thickly painted and made Lily feel anaemic.

She asked Mr. Baxter who the ladies were; he looked at her curiously, and said that some of them were artist's models.

Lily said, 'My sister's a model,' and for the first time felt proud of her sister.

'Do you ever sit?' asked Mr. Baxter, and added vaguely, 'I know some artists.'

Lily shook her head strongly, saying, 'No, thank you. Strip? Not likely. I'm not that sort,' and for the first time felt superior to Jane.

Mr. Baxter, slightly abashed, asked her what she would like. Lily said she would like some of the sticky stuff which the man was pouring the water into, because it looked exciting. Mr. Baxter said it was absinthe, and ordered lager beer for himself. Lily looked about her and thought that after this she would be quits with Jane, and more, for Jane's gentleman friend had never taken her to the Café George.

But it was a disappointing evening. When the absinthe came she poured out the water carefully, and thought the little bridge for the sugar was 'Ever so nice', but all she could say for the absinthe was that it was 'Ever so funny. More like cough-mixture.' She took two sips only, while Mr. Baxter, bold with beer, began to talk. He said that a lot of artists and well-known people came to the café every evening.

Lily said eagerly, 'Oh, show us! Is Nazimova here?'

But Mr. Baxter, looking round, could discover nobody that he had ever seen before, except a certain lady in a green hat whose persistent gaze he was carefully avoiding. 'Funny, I don't see any to-night,' he said.

'Pity,' said Lily, who attached importance to results. 'Do you know a lot of people that a lot of people know?'

'Quite a lot,' said Mr. Baxter, wondering which of his acquaintance he had particularly in mind.

'Well, who?'

'Oh, nobody that you'd know.'

'I believe you're a swank,' said Lily, who was also bolder than she had been a few minutes before.

Mr. Baxter felt that this could not have been the normal opening to Casanova's nights of pleasure, but he said nothing. The people at the middle tables were beginning to eat—spacious soles, expensive chops, seductive fried potatoes. Mr. Baxter would have enjoyed a Dover sole

himself, but all the money in his pocket was three and sixpence; and, unless in the morning he received a cheque from the editor of *Chic* for his article on 'The Dressing of the Russian Ballet', that three and sixpence must last him over the week-end. But in his rooms, or rather room, he had, he knew, three rashers of bacon, a kipper, and a bottle of whisky. He debated in his mind whether he should ask Lily to come home with him and share these refreshments. That had been the original intention, but he was beginning to think that Lily might be one of these hard girls who take everything and give nothing. Already she had taken an absinthe and called him a swank by way of return. And from that haughty remark about her 'not being that sort', he judged that she might have strong views about behaviour, though no one would have thought it to look at her. Many people were looking at her—too many, Mr. Baxter thought; for while he was proud to be the public companion of such youth and prettiness, he was also a little uncomfortable, for many of the glances, he thought, were as much pitiful as admiring. While he was debating, he began to talk about his ideas for revolutionizing the films by cutting out all natural backgrounds and substituting abstract designs to express the workings of the mind. This did not much interest Lily, who thought that the pictures were quite good as they were, and had no idea of what he meant by abstract design. She had come to the conclusion that there were several gentlemen in the room whom she liked better than Mr. Baxter; two in particular, bronzed gentlemen, who looked like explorers. They were talking about her, she could see, but whenever she looked at them too long, Mr. Baxter would pop a sudden question at her—'Do you see what I mean?'—because it was these two whose glances had been, he thought, particularly pitiful, and he disliked them.

At length, despairing of supper, and tired of Mr. Baxter's views about the film, Lily said, 'Well, I'd better be going home,' and picked up her attaché-case.

Mr. Baxter was still wondering whether he should or should not invite her home, when a robust lady a few feet off said very slowly and clearly, 'Baby-snatching, I call it.'

The conscience, or cowardice, of Casanova, made an

immediate decision, and he said, just as loudly, 'Very well. I'll see you to the station.'

On the way to the Tube station he made an appointment for Wednesday, but he went home to his kipper alone, a little, for a few minutes, despising himself, because he was too fastidious to go home with the lady in the green hat, and too ineffective to go home with Lily.

Jane had been so delighted to hear that Lily was at work that Lily had thought it a pity to spoil things by telling Jane that she had made an appointment with a strange gentleman in the Tube. Instead, she had said much about the severity and strain of her labours at the shop, and the fatigue of travelling by the Underground Railway; and Jane had quite coddled her all Sunday. But now, when she strolled on board at eight o'clock, she felt that there were bound to be questions, and she prepared to resent them with dignity. After all, she was an independent girl now, earning her own living.

It was difficult to enter the living-room of the *Blackbird* with dignity, because the entrance was made through a narrow hatch and down a perpendicular ladder, and the feet and legs were the first part of the dignified person to appear. The descending feet and legs of Lily did not look dignified to Jane, but guilty. Jane, who had spent the day sitting to Mr. Latimer, was preparing the supper, carving slice after slice of bread, and slabbing on butter generously with a spoon. Mr. Bell was lying on his bed in his cabin, reading about the greyhound racing at Shepherd's Bush, which was the new craze of London and was powerfully attracting him.

Jane said casually, 'You're late, Lily. Overtime, or what?'

Late? Late indeed! The guilty Lily discovered a grievance in the word. She could have endured to be blamed if she had had a gay time, but after that unexciting hour with Mr. Baxter it was too much. And instinct drove her to choose hanging for a sheep rather than a lamb alone. 'I've been dining,' she said grandly. Jane glanced at her, suddenly maternal.

'Dining, have you? Where?'

'Frascatti's.' It was a name she had seen recently in the papers, and was a good name, she thought.

'Frascatti's? Where's that?'

'Where's Frascatti's?' Lily wondered where Frascati's was. 'Well, it's difficult to say where a place is when you're driving in a car. It's in the Strand or somewhere.'

'In a car? Whose car?'

'A gentleman's.'

'Any one I know?'

'Oh, no. One of the clients at our place.'

'Oh?'

Jane did not know what to make of all this, and in her father's hearing did not wish to make too much of it.

'Well, did you have a nice dinner?' she said, putting down the loaf.

'Ever so nice, thank you,' said Lily. 'You can't imagine.'

'No, I can't,' said Jane, who was beginning to suspect exaggerations. Lily was cutting more bread and butter, and that was suspicious.

'What did you have?' said Jane.

Lily wished that Jane would not be so particular. She also wished that she had not dined at Frascati's. But now there was no help for it.

'We had *tarble dote*,' she said.

'What's that?'

'It's a kind of fish. Done up with trimmings and a yellow sauce.'

'Well, I never heard of it. What did you have after that?'

'Then we had a partridge. Roast. With chip potatoes.'

'Lucky girl!' said Jane. 'Anything else?'

'Well, I didn't want much else,' said Lily. 'I sat back and sipped my wine.'

'Oh, did you? What about your friend?'

'He had some caviare. And after that he had a plate of olives and some port wine. I took a caramel.'

'What's that?'

'It's a kind of cocktail.'

'Lily!' said Jane, shocked at last, for every reader of the *Sunday Gazette* knew that a cocktail was the beginning of the end. 'Well, you won't want any supper—that's one thing. Come on, Dad, supper's ready. Lily's been dining

with a gentleman at Frascatti's, and had partridge. Kettle, Lily!'

Mr. Bell shambled out of his cabin. Lily obediently fetched the boiling kettle, filled the teapot, and sat down on the locker and watched them. She was very hungry, but after her expensive meal at Frascati's she could scarcely eat thick bread and butter and damson jam.

Mr. Bell made no comment on his younger daughter's behaviour. Since the Derby fiasco and Jane's firm ultimatum he had surrendered the whole conduct of the family to her. Besides, Lily was at work now, and a grown-up girl. The chief thought in his mind was that somehow soon he must go to see these greyhounds and retrieve his fortunes. The horse had played him false; the dog, the friend of man, would perhaps be more trustworthy. There was a dog called Bell's Run, an omen, surely. But Jane had made him promise not to set foot in the White City, not to make another bet; indeed, he could not bet, for she would give him no money.

'Frascati's,' he said. 'I've had many a nice chop there in the old days.'

Lily watched impatiently while he took another slice of bread and butter.

'Perhaps,' he said, 'your friend will take you to see these greyhounds they're all talking about.' And he glanced guiltily at Jane.

'Now then, Dad!' said Jane.

Lily said calmly, 'He's going to. On Wednesday.' Mr. Baxter had never mentioned the greyhounds; he was no sportsman, he had never betted. But Lily had suddenly determined that Mr. Baxter should take her to the greyhounds, and that she would win a great sum of money. For one thing, it would annoy Jane, who had gone pi-face and was really a little too big for her boots these days. And Lily, in spite of the Derby, had still a secret belief that there was something in this betting.

'A clean sport, they say,' said Mr. Bell. 'A fine, clean sport. I'd like to see it.'

'Sport!' said Jane. A sudden panic took hold of her. She had thought her father cured of his madness. If he were to break out again there was no knowing what might

happen. 'If you set foot in that place, Dad,' she said, playful but firm, 'you shan't come back to this boat—see? I mean it, Dad.'

Mr. Bell saw that she meant it, and took refuge in his cup of tea. Lily watched the pile of bread and butter dwindle, and was hungrier than before.

'Any tea to spare, Jane?' she said.

'Want some?'

'I could do with half a cup.'

'How will it go with that wine you had?'

'Chance it,' said Lily shortly.

She sipped her tea and fixed her eyes on the last four slices of bread and butter. Jane did not invite her to take bread and butter with her tea, and Lily did not like to suggest it herself.

The sun set outside and the room grew dusky. It was hot. The two cats dropped from the hatch and sidled up to the table, begging. Jane gave them a saucer of tepid tea. Mr. Bell took another piece of bread and butter. Jane took another piece of bread and butter. They ate in silence, busy with their thoughts. Jane was worried about her family. She was afraid that her father would be too much for her after all. She did not know what to think of this tale of Lily's—whether she was inventing something or concealing something. If Lily's friend was really a gentleman, her own case was a warning; and if he was rich, then, according to Ernest, the thing was fatal.

'You might light the lamp, Lily,' she said.

'There's no hurry,' said Lily, her eyes on the last two pieces of bread and butter.

'Finished, Dad?'

'Yes, Jane.'

Jane rose and scraped the butter off a piece of bread. She put the scraping back in the butter-dish, and began to crumble the bread for the cats.

Lily could not stand this. She said quickly, 'That going begging?'

'Do you want it?'

'I don't mind.'

'Sorry. I didn't think you'd want anything after that dinner.'

'We dined early,' said Lily.

Jane lit the lamp, with one eye on Lily, who was doing her best to eat as if she were not hungry.

'Has your friend got money?' asked Mr. Bell.

'Lots,' said Lily, with her mouth full.

'What's his name?' said Jane.

Lily chewed and did not answer for a moment or two. The lamp gathered strength and flooded her with unwelcome light. She turned her head away. It was deplorable, but she had forgotten Mr. Baxter's name. After all, he had only flung it at her as he leaped out of the train. She thought there was a 'B' in it.

'Baldwin,' she said at last.

Jane smiled to herself, relieved of one worry. Lily was swanking.

'There's a stale half-loaf in the tin,' she said, 'if you're still hungry.'

Lily rose immediately and went to the bread-tin; and Jane smiled again. She took her writing materials, an 'Invicta' writing-pad and a pen from Woolworth's with a magical nib that would write two hundred words after one dip in the ink; she sat on the keelson and wrote to the aunt in Liverpool. For the second time she appealed to the good aunt to find work for her father, and keep him out of mischief, for now that they had taken to betting on dogs a twopenny tram ride away, she was afraid that Mr. Bell might break out again any day. Then she said, 'Wash up, Lily,' and slipped across to the 'Black Swan' to earn her nine shillings behind the bar. What with one thing and another, she had her hands full, she thought. On the wharf she looked up at the starry sky, and in starry letters she seemed to see the monstrous legend:

'JANE: THE MOTHER-GIRL'

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